

March 1, 2024

Re: SF 3534

Denise Specht  
*President*

Monica Byron  
*Vice President*

Rodney Rowe  
*Secretary-Treasurer*

Carrie Lucking  
*Executive Director*

Dear Minnesota Senate Members:

On behalf of the educators of Minnesota, we thank you for the opportunity to comment on the need for consistent, high standards for the training and conduct of licensed peace officers who work in Minnesota's schools, often with students with special education needs.

However, I must say at the outset that Education Minnesota's position is that the primary responsibility for providing a safe and equitable learning environment in Minnesota's classrooms falls on the state's superintendents, principals and other administrators.

Our educators believe all adults working in a school setting should be prepared to work with students at their most regulated and their most dysregulated. All adults should have the tools to help students keep themselves and others safe without engaging in a traumatic restraint. Given this, there should be a larger investment in training that would give all adults in a school building, including licensed peace officers, these tools. Concurrently, there is no defensible reason not to ensure that all adults have accountability for using the tools.

Licensed academic staff in every school building have long been held to account by a licensing board—whether it be the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board or Board of School Administrators—for meeting the standards that those boards have adopted for professional conduct. We strongly support a directive for the Peace Officer Standards and Training, or POST, board to clarify the professional obligations for peace officers working in schools and for the board to enforce those standards through its licensing power.

Additionally, we support the same limitations on prone restraints for peace officers that our own members work under. As several testifiers have noted in previous hearings, Minnesota has banned these holds for use on students receiving special education services for several years. For those students, Minn. Stat. § 125A.0942 prohibits any staff person from using a restraint of any kind if that staff member has not had proper de-escalation training. Because a student's receipt of special education services is generally not readily clear, and now that one in six (17%) Minnesota students receive such services, many teachers exercise extreme caution before restraining any student.

Therefore, prone holds are not part of any regular practices, best or otherwise, in schools. However, it is still important for our members that they have clarity about what is permitted by state law, and what the consequences will be if an interaction with a student does not go as planned. To that end, we support clarification of the reasonable force standard so that all school staff will know what is allowed and what is not. The training our members undergo in this area reinforces the implications of these kinds of holds and it is not an unreasonable expectation that every adult in our schools should operate with the same clear understanding of these parameters.

Thus far, there appears to be bipartisan agreement that decisions about professional standards for peace officers working in schools should be data driven. We would certainly add our voices to this chorus. To that end, we continue to support policies to make it easier for parents to know where school resource officers are working and what training those individuals have had. A centralized source of information would be beneficial for parents and the public. Additionally, it seems clear that policymakers want more information about when uses of force occur in the

41 Sherburne Ave., St. Paul, MN 55103  
651-227-9541 800-652-9073 Fax 651-292-4802  
[www.educationminnesota.org](http://www.educationminnesota.org)

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the National Education Association and AFL-CIO.*



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school setting. Requiring districts and peace officers to document these interactions would enrich this discussion and seems to be uncontroversial.

Currently, Education Minnesota members are seeing elevated levels of student dysregulation and staff are struggling. Working with students who are extraordinarily stressed can burn out educators and pass secondary trauma to them. They appreciate the help of other caring adults who are prepared to help a student de-escalate and process their emotions. As has been clear in some of the testimony on this issue, not all students have had positive interactions with licensed peace officers in their buildings. Ensuring school resource officers have the training to work effectively in a school setting will make all students and staff safer.

We appreciate being invited, along with several other education organizations, to participate in the process of creating a model policy for school resource officers to follow. Candidly, there were some items for which we would have liked to have seen more changes to, which is true of most legislation that addresses a complicated issue. We appreciate the open conversations that allowed anyone who wished to offer comment on this bill the opportunity to do so. And, when the Legislature clarifies or changes the requirements for staff working with students, Education Minnesota members will adapt and continue to be there for Minnesota's students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Denise Specht". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Denise" and last name "Specht" clearly distinguishable.

Denise Specht  
*President, Education Minnesota*

