

## Testimony for Bill 180, Nov. 13, 2023

Greetings Chair Kennedy and Chair Livingstone.

My name is Lisa Jeanne Graf and I am a self-identified autistic woman who lives in Boston Massachusetts.

I support H.180 because it would address a serious civil rights gap in Massachusetts law. Although common sense would expect that disabled residents would have equal protections against physical harm or more protections - the opposite is actually the case.

Bill H.180 would change that with the following language “No such program may employ any form of physical contact or punishment that is otherwise prohibited by law or would be prohibited if used on a non-disabled person.”

The opposite is legally sanctioned now. A program can employ a form of physical contact or punishment on a disabled person that **is** prohibited by law on a non-disabled person or animal.

This includes the use of aversives which this bill would ban the use of. Aversives legally can be used to change a disabled person’s behaviors without their consent. Aversives include hitting, pinching, and even shockingly electric shock. Aversives can also include the withholding of food and the bathroom.

My daughter, when she was in elementary school, told me about a classmate who had difficulty writing by hand. To motivate him to practice his writing, food was withheld if he did not practice. By the end of the school year he lost a great deal of weight.

My testimony today is for the use of aversives like this example and more extreme examples to no longer be legally possible.

The use of aversives shows a child that changing their behaviors is more important than their comfort, and dignity. It also harms the students in a classroom who are not targeted by showing them that their teachers can’t be trusted to behave humanely and they can feel powerless in not being able to intervene.

This bill is important because it offers wide protections to disabled people in the state- from students in educational spaces, to adults in residential programs, to elders in nursing homes.

Protections should be there for all of us regardless of our age and regardless if we have a disability or not.

As our public servants, I hope that you choose to secure your own political legacy by being brave enough to be on the right side of history and support this important civil rights bill H180 as well as oppose Bill H 170.

Thank you for listening