



Limit School Resource Officers from Using Restraints On Kids Under 10 Years Old

By Alycia Castillo, Policy Analyst

April 2021

HARSH DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES ARE DAMAGING TO VERY YOUNG CHILDREN

School Resource Officers (SROs) are on-campus law enforcement officers in schools. Although these officers are ostensibly placed in schools for student safety, excessive SRO responses often lead to the criminalization of students. Harsh responses to typical behaviors are harmful to young children for a number of reasons:

- Expulsion and suspension for young children leads to [high rates](#) of expulsion and suspension later in school.
- Labeling young children as in need of harsh discipline has [lasting detrimental effects](#) on their social-emotional learning. It also creates a negative lens through which teachers and administrators view them.
- Early negative impacts on social-emotional learning have been shown to create [negative outcomes](#) later in life, in areas including unemployment, criminal activity, substance use, and mental and physical health issues.

Harsh disciplinary practices often reflect [racial and other biases](#). Although Black students comprise 15 percent of students nationally, they represent 31 percent of students referred to law enforcement or arrested. Although just 12 percent of the student population has special needs, these students represent a quarter of referrals to law enforcement or school-related arrests.

HB 2975 [Hull] would provide guidelines for SROs, limiting their ability to use restraints on children 10 years old or younger “unless the student poses a serious risk of harm to the student or another person.” This would prevent trauma for young children in public schools without jeopardizing a safe educational environment.

ONE FAMILY’S STORY: A 7-YEAR-OLD BOY WITH AUTISM HANDCUFFED AT SCHOOL IN SAN ANTONIO

In September 2019, 7-year-old Joey (pseudonym) was handcuffed and taken to the hospital. After he had experienced an over-stimulation-based outburst in the classroom, administrators had attempted to call his dad, but they misdialed his number. The administrators then called the police. They later reached Joey’s dad, who asked to take him home. Police refused and took Joey to a nearby hospital for evaluation, where he was promptly released into his father’s custody. Ever since, Joey has expressed fears of being arrested in the future.

“Handcuffs should never be used on a small child, especially for a child with mental disabilities – they’re confused; they don’t know what is happening when they’re placed in handcuffs and taken away in a police car,” Joey’s mom said. ***“I’m terrified for him. If this is what police will do to him as a 7-year-old, what will they do when he’s twelve? Sixteen? He has a right to an education, but he’s being stripped of his right when he isn’t accommodated or helped in these situations.”***

