

Dear Chair Doherty and Members of the Committee,

I have worked as an assistant in special education for ten years. I love what I do. Working with children and adults with special needs is my calling in life- the first time I was asked to help a student with special needs I was seven years old, and opportunities continued through to my college experiences.

I have worked closely with teachers in the mainstream setting as well as in special education classrooms. I have worked with physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists and nurses, carrying out delegations, procedures and protocols. I have stayed current on my OIS training. I have a great deal of experience in my field, and I'm always looking to learn more.

I have had objects thrown at me, been hit, kicked, bit, scratched, pushed, and have come into contact with every human bodily fluid, including being urinated on. All of those things can be cause for frustration, but I am able to recognize that these incidents are indication of student needs. However, an incident that took place during the summer of 2013 will always stand out to me and all of my coworkers and is why I support HB 3318 -1.

In addition to my regularly assigned positions, I have worked seven sessions of the extended school year (ESY) in my district. I always look forward to this wonderful opportunity to learn and grow with new and different staff and students. In July of 2013 I was assigned to work with a student who I was not very familiar with. I was to work with him one-to-one during ESY. The first day the student attended ESY, we were on a walk in the hallway when we came to a recessed brick doorway and the student became agitated and dysregulated. The classroom teacher came to help with the situation, as well as the school nurse. The nurse was standing at the outside edge of the doorway, while the teacher and I were standing in the doorway facing each other with the student between us. The student was facing the teacher with their back to me. The three of us were helping the student into their bus harness, and the last thing we needed to do was zip up the harness. I squatted to connect the zipper, with my back against the wall, when the student butted his head backward into my face. Everything went black. I went to the emergency room right away, where it was determined through a CT scan that I had suffered a concussion.

I was released from work for the next 3 days (the rest of the week.) Aside from the inevitable headache, I experienced hypersomnia, general loss of balance and weakness, and difficulty walking. I returned to work the following Monday, but early Tuesday morning a new side-effect emerged: my limbs flailed uncontrollably during times of deep relaxation and sleep. Doctors performed another CT scan and ordered an EEG to rule out seizures. Test results indicated that I was not having seizures. I was experiencing the effects of bruised nerves at the base of my brain. Again, I was excused from the remainder of the work week.

Because this injury occurred during work, my medical expenses were covered. However, because summer work for assistants is not part of the contracted school year, I did not receive any monetary compensation for the many hours of work that I was forced to miss.

Today, 3 ½ years later, I am still dealing with the effects of this injury. My balance has not returned to normal, and I still occasionally wake up in the middle of the night to my arms and legs moving uncontrollably. I also experience PTSD as a result of this incident. I have talked with other staff members who were present, and at least two of them were so traumatized by my experience that they have not applied to work the ESY program since that summer.

I understand that working with students, especially those students with special needs, is a risk I have chosen to take. I understand that injuries and accidents happen, but how long before we can get the training and information we need while at work?

-Kristen Croft