



MDDC Fact Sheet:

H.245 – An Act regarding the use of aversive therapy.

In Brief

Aversive therapy is a method of controlling behavior by inflicting pain and/or fear on a person. Nationwide, there has been a long history of aversive therapy on people with disabilities in public schools and programs and state funded/operated facilities. Massachusetts is home to the Judge Rotenberg Educational Center (JRC), the only care facility for people with disabilities in the U.S. to still use electric shock therapy. Many leading organizations oppose the use of electric shock, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the American Association of People with Disabilities. The U.N.'s Human Rights Council considers the treatment to be torture.¹ This bill prohibits the use of physical pain or denial of human needs to change the behavior of a person with a disability in any setting in Massachusetts.

What would be prohibited under H.245?

- H.245 would prohibit the use of aversive therapy to change behavior in any facility or program funded, operated, licensed, or approved by the Commonwealth. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - hitting,
 - pinching,
 - and electric shock.
- H.245 would also not allow an individual to be denied:
 - reasonable sleep,
 - food/water,
 - shelter,
 - bedding,
 - bathroom facilities,
 - or any other aspect expected of a humane existence.
- H.245 would prohibit any form of physical contact or punishment that would be prohibited by law if used on a non-disabled person.

Who would this help and why is this important?

- H.245 aims to help ensure the safety and dignity of people with all forms of disabilities, including intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).
- The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) “condemns aversive practices” that cause pain, could result in injury or death, and dehumanize individuals.²
- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) “can address challenging behaviors and improve overall classroom outcomes, including enhanced behavioral outcomes, increased student engagement, improved social–emotional skills, and reduced discipline issues.”³

Sources

1. Ruhalter, Kana, and Arun Rath. “Electric Shock Therapy Is Still Allowed in One Mass. Treatment Facility. Advocates Say Change Is Long Overdue.” GBH, September 11, 2023. <https://www.wgbh.org/news/local/2023-09-11/electric-shock-therapy-is-still-allowed-in-one-mass-treatment-facility-advocates-say-change-is-long-overdue>.
2. “Aversive Procedures.” www.aaidd.org, www.aaidd.org/news-policy/policy/position-statements/aversive-procedures.
3. <https://ies.ed.gov/rel-northwest/2025/01/positive-behavioral-interventions-and-support>

About the MDDC

The Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council (MDDC) is an independent agency, funded by the federal government, dedicated to empowering people with developmental disabilities and their families to enjoy full productive lives by promoting self-sufficiency, community inclusion & opportunity.



The MDDC works to improve the system of supports for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families by bringing advocates together with policymakers to be sure people with developmental disabilities are included in policy decisions that impact their lives.

The MDDC also serves as an objective resource to inform public policy at the local, state and federal levels, to better meet the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

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