

## **SF 2782 Labor Omnibus Bill**

Thank Senator John Marty and Senator Jennifer A. McEwen and the Finance Committee for taking the time to read through my testimony and others.

My name is Haley Brunelle from Minnetonka, Minnesota. I'm writing on behalf of my son, Felix who was born with a rare chromosomal deletion and spent the first 70 days of his life in the NICU before coming home. His genetic deletion results in multiple diagnosis (too many to list) the need for a wheelchair, feeding tube, AAC (communication) device and a team of nearly 30 doctors, therapists and specialists to help him thrive. His Dad and I have worked tirelessly to provide him with as many experiences and opportunities as possible that are out in the community, but it takes a LOT of time and effort to even leave the house, let alone use the toilet.

Felix does use the bathroom, but he no longer fits on a child's changing table and he cannot stand. Felix's school is one of the few that has an adult size changing table he uses several times a day. That, and the mature disability program support at his school was a determining factor of our move from South Minneapolis to Hopkins. To get Felix's pants down he needs to lay down and be transferred to the toilet, I refuse to lay him on a disgusting bathroom floor. I wouldn't even put my purse on a public restroom floor, let alone my kid. And have you ever tried to lift 40-50 lbs of dead weight off the floor? As Felix gets older (and heavier) I've found myself becoming less motivated to take him out due to the toileting issues I know we'll face. For events longer than a couple hours (at the Target Center, a sports game, a show, etc.) we just don't go. And on top of that we can't go anywhere without our adaptive toilet seat to accommodate his lack of muscle on his backside.

Felix is the smartest boy in his Kindergarten class at Glen Lake Elementary School and destined to move mountains. You may have heard of the 5th and 6th graders at his Hopkin's district school raising money to help build him and the 7 other wheelchair users in the school an accessible playground so they can play with the other kids at recess—it made CBS National News earlier this year. Many years ago we passed a law to include the disability community in our school system and I'm grateful we did. Because kids at his school see him, they want to include him, they are so emotionally invested they are willing to put in the work to raise a million dollars to help kids like Felix be able to play just like them. But if you don't continue to offer places these kids can go to be truly included, they start staying home. They stop being seen, they stop being included and they are forgotten. And WE stop thinking about their needs. I guarantee you the kids at his school will grow up to be better, more aware, compassionate human beings than kids who don't go to school with so many disabled kids. By having disabled people fully integrated into our community we provide everyone around them an opportunity to realize just how lucky they are, and offer ways for us all to get creative about how we solve problems of inclusivity. If 5th and 6th grade kids can see the need and benefits, surely adults can?

Until you have someone with a disability in your life it is hard to imagine just what we are faced with and how much extra time and energy it takes. I know, I too was completely blind to the hardship the disability community faces before I had my son. If nothing else, consider this: As we age we are all becoming disabled, some people have just had to deal with it a whole lot longer. I encourage you to strongly consider passing this bill into law. The continued presence of the disabled community and continued integration in our community depends on it and one of the greatest challenges in being out in the community is a dignified and easiER place to use the toilet.