

April 11, 2023

Chairman Marty and Committee Members

My name is Sarah St. Louis, from Shorewood, MN, Senate District 45, and I am writing in support of SF 2782 the Labor Omnibus bill, particularly in support Article 5, Section 27, (n) Adult-Sized Changing tables.

In the United States there are approximately 80+ million humans that have a disability: 20 million children and 60+ million adults. 67% of our population is uncomfortable interacting with a person with a disability and that number rises significantly the more evident or complex a disability is. The reason for this is because of ableism, the discrimination of and social prejudice against people with disabilities on the belief that nondisabled and non-neurodiverse people are superior. Judgement based on abilities is so ingrained in society that it's used for exclusionary purposes and is hardly ever questioned or realized and ableism is why we, as a society, have forced people with disabilities to be changed on a dirty public bathroom floor or completely excluded from participating in community and most people don't even consider that not all individuals use a toilet. We have decided that they are not worth dignity, respect, and healthy, safe, and sanitary spaces to use and made this decision without their input or guidance on what their actual needs are.

I have been in the architecture and construction industry my entire life and professionally for 20 years. In this time, I have seen how ableist mindsets, by those in my industry, have been used to discriminate against and harm individuals with disabilities and their caregivers. The thought of adult-sized changing tables has never crossed most of their minds and even the bare minimum accessibility code is not a priority and is almost always overlooked during the building process.

It is my understanding that there are two (2) groups that are in opposition of adult-sized changing tables becoming a part of our state building code, the Chamber of Commerce and the NAIOP, an organization made up of commercial real estate developers. Neither of these organizations have had any conversations with the disability community to even know what they need or want to fully participate in community or access businesses in our state. Ableism.

They claim that this will hurt businesses. However, the disability community in the U.S. has \$490 billion in expendable income, and this does not include the expendable income of their families. Also, brands/companies that show representation, products and make their businesses accessible and inclusive for the disability community see a 28% return in revenue and 31% in profit gains. So, in other words, catering to the disability community is good for businesses.

They also claim the cost to implement adult-sized changing tables is a burden to small and mid-size businesses. This is also not an accurate statement. I have been working with the state Department of Labor on the language for this to be a part of state building code and they are excited to make this a reality in this great state of Minnesota. Here are the facts: this will only apply to new and renovated construction of businesses that have an occupancy load of 300 or more people, this excludes almost all small and mid-sized businesses. It will require medical facilities for the public, Group B occupancies providing educational facilities for students above the 12<sup>th</sup> grade (i.e., colleges and universities), Group E occupancies (i.e., preschool-12<sup>th</sup> grade educational facilities), places of public accommodation that have

an occupancy load of 300 or more people, parks and projects that receive state funding or tax incentives that accommodate the public.

The cost of these adjustable height tables starts around \$2,000 dollars and goes up from there. For smaller business looking to update their restroom facilities, not included in this code, there is a federal ADA tax incentive, Section 44 of the IRS Code, of up to \$15,000 a year to bring their business into accessibility inclusiveness.

They also claim that this is a burden for developers or contractors to do. This is also untrue. This statement is fully based in ableism, laziness and making ignorant excuses. The fact is, these groups cost businesses billions of dollars a year in lawsuits because they fail to even do the bare minimum of the accessibility code and when they do, they do not do it to code. It is not that they can't, it is because they allow ableism and lack of interaction with the disability community to decide that people with disabilities are simply not worth the effort or don't deserve to fully participate and live in their communities.

As a project manager of architecture, I hate excuses, especially ableist excuses! I expect results, not excuses, especially when they are rooted in the fact that those people pushing these excuses belong to the 67% and have never taken any time to have a conversation with people with disabilities to find out how they experience the world and work with them to make it better but instead they continue to create the ableist environments they always have. They would rather blame people with disabilities for their failure to do their job right the first time and instead make excuses.

**This is NOT the disability community's fault!**

**They are NOT the ones to blame!**

You could leave the room you are in today and fall down the stairs, slip on the sidewalks that are never properly cleared, get in a car accident or have a stroke and instantly become a part of the largest minority group in our country and tomorrow you could experience your half naked body being put on a dirty, public restroom floor to be changed because you never thought that having a sanitary, safe adult-sized changing table was worth it or needed. You will learn very quickly how your ableism got in the way of your new needs.

I implore you to pass SF 2782 and ensure that the adult-sized changing tables stay in this bill, so that we can start ending ableism in this great state of Minnesota and can move this to Governor Walz's desk so that we can finally bring some form of dignity and respect to the disability community and their families.

Thank you,  
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