



SE MN Center for Independent Living, Inc.

April 4th, 2024

Chair
Kari Dziedzic, 60, DFL
3113 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Ranking Minority Member
Bruce Anderson, 29, R
2209 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: SF 5244

To Chair Dziedzic, Lead Representative Anderson, and Members of the Committee:

Our organization writes to you today to express our community's support for SF 5244. As a Center for Independent Living led by people with disabilities since 1981, we are people with disabilities and allies partnering with our larger community to protect our civil liberties and move our systems into justice. As this session has progressed, we have continued to identify people throughout Minnesota who are subject to guardianship who cannot be present to testify of their experiences and their support for guardianship reforms.

SEMCIL has been public in our support of SF 5244 knowing that our community members subject to guardianship have many barriers to being present this legislative session. Direct care workforce shortages has had a global impact on the disability services and supports system which leaves people and caregivers without support staff and drivers who cannot transport individuals in a timely manner to arrive at the Capitol to testify. Add in geography, people with disabilities in Greater Minnesota have farther to travel, more monetary costs, and more personal health costs for many. These are the standard barriers that make it difficult for individuals with disabilities to get to the Capitol for a hearing.

For persons subject to guardianship, they have no authority under current laws and practices to write a letter to advocate. They do not have their own authority to make arrangements to testify because how can they advocate against an institution that does not permit them to speak up? Currently, there are no working avenues for people subject to guardianship to have protected access to self-advocate for their own decision-making rights. Two examples that I want to highlight that have come from our network of Centers for Independent Living here in Minnesota:

A young adult living in Greater Minnesota who currently volunteers the same amount of hours as a full time job, drives themselves to appointments in their community, and desires to make their own decisions but cannot find a way file with the courts because their current guardian refuses to support their decision. This young adult may have transportation but does not have access to monetary means to make it to the Capitol from where they live in order to testify this Friday, April 5th.

Another individual in the Metro subject to guardianship is close by but because of transportation, support staffing and the needed permission to access signing up for testimony, they are unable to write a letter or be present at a hearing.



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These individuals reached out because they are desperate. They have no other recourse but to have their story told by another, and out of the potential of retaliation, any identifying information has not been shared publicly in this letter. Please support SF 5244. Our systems are inaccessible for people most impacted to be present to advocate for the violations of their rights. We need a task force to reform this institution. Not all who are currently subject to guardianship need guardianship. The status quo makes it easy and quick to remove a person's basic right to autonomy and exceedingly difficult to advocate for themselves when egregious abuse of the institution or by the guardian.

Sincerely,

Rosalie Eisenreich, MPH
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