

Catherine Enz, MPH
Regarding S.F. 5097
Pro
April 1st, 2024

Minnesota Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee:

My name is Catherine Enz I am an adopted daughter of two blind parents, a successful healthcare industry professional, and a disability justice advocate. I am writing this testimony to express my support for S.F. 5097, a bill that will ensure parental rights for parents with disabilities.

At seven months old I was adopted from South Korea by my loving parents, who both happen to be completely blind. I grew up in Edina, went to college at Hamline University, and got my graduate degree at the University of Minnesota. Throughout my whole life I've been asked the questions, "what's it like having blind parents?" my response is always, "I don't know. What's it like having sighted parents?". Having blind parents is my "normal"—I couldn't imagine it any other way. I have cherished loving family memories, embarrassing moments I wish I could forget, trips I always want to remember, and lessons I learned from them. But it's not because they are blind parents; it's because they are extraordinary parents, period.

My parents may have done things in a different way than yours because they had to use non-visual skills to raise my sister and me. However, my parents do cook, and clean, and cheer me on in sports games, and help me with homework, and tell when I'm sick, and know when I was misbehaving, and any other critical parental function. But the general public's assumption is that doing things my parents' way is worse, simply because they cannot imagine doing it without vision.

That mindset is the reason why disabled parents don't currently have equal rights to parent in Minnesota. I truly believe that if everyone understood parents with disabilities CAN do the same things parents without disabilities can do, they would support S.F. 5097. Because they can, they just may do it in a different way, but that does not mean it's a worse way or harms the child.

I am not saying there aren't "bad" parents with disabilities, I'm sure there are, just like there are "bad" parents without disabilities. In these unfortunate situations proper action needs to be taken. This bill will not change that, it will only ensure that showing someone is a "bad" parent needs to be more clearly evident than just having a disability. In the simplest terms, this bill is saying that having a disability does not automatically make someone a "bad" parent. Which from my personal experience I can undoubtedly say it does not.

I hope my testimony can shed some light on why this bill is so critical to pass for keeping Minnesota families together. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.