

From: Kallie Decker

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Good afternoon,

I write to you as a sister, a daughter, a friend, a wife and mother. I have three daughters: 6, 9, and 11 years old. I have a bachelor's degree for the University of Northern Iowa and have worked various jobs before becoming a mom and while my kiddos were very young.

I have traveled to Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and many states around the nation. One of the greatest learning experiences for me as a child was traveling with my parents and experiencing other parts of the country and cultures. I am a blind mom, and have blind parents.

I'm sure this last statement is surprising. Growing up in a larger town in Iowa, we utilized limited public transit, and taxi services to get around, as well as walked a lot to get where we were going. I participated in dance, choir, and the school paper as a kid, and my parents were supportive in helping me achieve my goals. Growing up: I never thought much of my parents being blind. We had the same triumphs and struggles that most young people have with their kids. I was always provided for and supported.

I always knew I wanted to be a mom, and never questioned my ability to do so. It wasn't until I became an adult myself, that I recognized how differently I would be perceived as a blind parent. When I was pregnant with my oldest daughter, I experienced the most condescending and negative comments from healthcare professionals. Several folks felt I should terminate my pregnancy, or do genetic testing, and perhaps change my mind. Around the time my daughter was born there was another blind couple who had been separated from their child. This gave me tremendous anxiety. What if a social worker comes to our room? It won't be because we are new parents, it will be because they doubt my ability to care for my child.

Flash forward to all that life throws at you, that anxiety follows you. Is our child old enough to stay home for short periods of time? Should we let them play in the yard or ride their bike in the neighborhood? These are all ordinary questions parents ask themselves: but we always have the added layer of blindness, and will someone disagree or try to intervene with those decisions. Visiting the doctor involves questioning whether you are taken seriously regarding any concerns you have, and if there will be that extra layer of judgement. I guarantee you blindness will be brought up 9 times out of 10 even if we are there for strep throat or an ingrown toenail. I have made many decisions on what clinic/doctors to see based on their disability history, to avoid these situations.

Why is all of this important? Because I don't want other parents to fear having their parental rights revoked due to their blindness. We need more protocols put into place so that does not happen. Please strengthen and protect the rights of blind parents.

