

Rob and Debbie Hobson

S.F. 5097 Pro

To whom it may concern

I am writing in favor of S.F. 5097. This is a bill that supports the rights of blind parents and ensures the parents will not lose their rights to their children or miss parenting time with their children based solely upon the fact they are disabled.

We, as blind parents, can do just as many things as a sighted parent. We can teach our children and help with homework. We can participate in their activities such as being a Cub Scout den leader or a Girl Scout troop leader. We can keep them safe and teach them boundaries. We can be everything that a parent needs to be.

Many times, the barriers we face as blind parents come from outside sources, such as society's belief in us. We are held back by what other people think we can or cannot do. This has been a factor in our own parenting journey.

When we went to the hospital to have our first child, Debbie did not disclose her vision as she was afraid this would be factored into her care. She had a surgical delivery under general anesthetic and Rob had to be primary caregiver for the baby. He asked normal questions for a new parent such as how to best put on a diaper. The nurses decided based on the fact he was blind that he could not take care of the baby, and Debbie was forced to take on that responsibility before she could heal herself, or the baby would be removed from the room. Rob was not given the opportunity to learn from the nurses like any other new father due to their internal biases toward him.

Down the line, our child was injured while at a daycare. We sought medical care and the injuries led to a child protective services investigation. Even though the child was hurt on the daycare property, the investigators focused the case on how much we could see, and how our vision, or lack thereof, impacted our ability to parent. How, when, and what led to his injuries seemed less important than investigating whether we could see or not.

Every time a blind parent has a child who is injured, even if the blind parent was not present, it is a constant fear that they will lose parenting rights based solely on their vision. There is a constant fear of "will this trigger an investigation" even if the child is hurt in a normal childhood activity such as riding a bike. We must always fear medical staff or a CPS worker who is so afraid of blindness that the internal bias interferes with finding out why the child got hurt and whether or not anyone is at fault.

This bill will help ensure blind parents' rights are protected during court proceedings, investigations, and seeking medical care.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Rob and Debbie Hobson