

To the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

I am writing to you to express my support for S.F. 5097. I am a blind woman with A.D.H.D. and chronic migraines living in the Twin Cities. I am a child of blind parents and a member of a parenting team for an eight-year-old child who I think of as my own. I also have a master's degree on children's rights from the University of Minnesota. I mention this to explain that I believe very strongly in respecting and protecting children. I believe that most of the time, the best thing for any child is to stay with their parents. This bill will protect this right for both parents and children.

There are many harmful beliefs in society about the capabilities of people with disabilities. As a child, my mom did everything a parent should do. She made sure my brother and I ate our vegetables, did our homework, and went to the doctor. She read to us every night and instilled in me a love of literature. Yet, when we were outside, whether playing at the park, going to get our nails done, or going to buy groceries, people would stop her and question her ability to be a parent because like me she was blind. I was always worried that someone would judge us or question her abilities. I was a theater kid, I wanted to mismatch my clothes and spray dye my hair, but I never did because I was afraid people would think my mom did not know how to make sure I had the right clothes.

I was lucky that no legal action was ever taken. When my parents got divorced, my sighted father was encouraged by his lawyer to try to get her parental rights taken away because she was blind. Fortunately, he adamantly refused, explaining to the lawyer that she had always done most of the parenting, but the story could have ended differently.

As a parent myself now, I think about this fear often. Every member of my child's parenting team is blind. As a result, I worry that if one person assumes all our abilities could be questioned. Especially as he gets older, I want to give him more chances to be independent, for example, letting him pick out items at the grocery store. I worry though when I do this that someone will think he needs to do this to help me, not just because he wants to and was given permission.

The passage of this bill will allow all parents with disabilities to raise their children without fear. If a disabled person is not sure how to do something regarding parenting, they can get that information without being afraid of losing their child.

I would be proud to live in a state that protects all parents with disabilities. It would help my family and so many others. I strongly encourage you all to pass this bill to increase the equal rights of Minnesotans.

Thank you.

Samantha Flax