

From: Steve Decker  
Bill No. (S.F. 5097) Pro

I'm writing to encourage adoption of S.F. 5097. As a blind father, I personally know the need for stronger protection for the rights of parents with disabilities. As my wife (who is also blind) and I raise our three children together, I'm struck by how often we question our decisions about how to parent, not based on what's best for our children but how we may be perceived by professionals who have the power to take our children away from us, based on nothing more than blindness. Though I'm successfully employed as a manager for a Fortune Fifty company, have attended college, own a nice home, and have accomplished much in my life, many sighted people presume that my blindness automatically precludes me from parenting effectively. When we discuss how much independence to give our children, the right age to leave them home alone, how far to let them travel unattended in our neighborhood, or when they need medical attention for an injury or illness, we know that professionals question our capacity. This is despite the fact that nearly all children who receive medical treatment have sighted parents, proving that a child's health and safety is not correlated with the vision of their parents. People sometimes address our children rather than us. They sometimes praise our children when they're as young as pre-school age, for helping us, assuming they lead us around and complete many tasks for us. This is something that is just not done for sighted parents. In reality, our children help us as much as any children help their parents. They may help us read something, but we teach them how to read. They sometimes use their vision in helpful ways when navigating in the community, but it's up to us to know where we're going, and how to get there. We help them with homework, teach them how to think and solve problems, how to spell, and much more, just like sighted parents. We rely on our other senses, and alternative techniques (like attaching bells to the shoe of a mobile toddler) or having conversations with them to ensure they're safe and staying out of trouble. Blind people have been successfully raising our children for many years. This bill is needed so that the law clearly states a parent's disability can't, by itself, lead to limitations on custody, visitation, adoption, or other parenting tasks.