



Sumukha Terakanambi
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Chair Hoffman and Members of the Committee on Human Services
Minnesota Senate
State Senate Building
95 University Ave W. Room 1200
Saint Paul, MN 55103

Dear Chair Hoffman and Members of the Committee on Human Services:

My name is Sumukha Terakanambi, I am 26 years old, and I am from Lakeville, Minnesota. I am also a person with a physical disability and a self-advocate. I want to thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to provide my testimony. I am writing in support of SF 985 which would provide funding for a statewide disability inclusion initiative. This initiative will educate people with disabilities and their families about resources and the disability services that are available, increase self-advocacy, encourage employers to hire more people with disabilities, and build capacity for culturally specific services. It would also create a certification program for businesses and community spaces so people with disabilities know which places are welcoming, fully accessible, and free from discrimination.

This legislation is important to me because people with disabilities continue to face significant barriers including workplace discrimination, inaccessibility of the community, and a lack of information about available services and supports. These barriers prevent the full inclusion of people with disabilities in our community.

Personally, there were many instances where I was unable to make informed choices and missed out on beneficial programs due to inadequate information about services. It was incredibly frustrating and stressful to navigate a complex system alone and feel like I had no support. I was even under the assumption that if I sought meaningful employment opportunities, I would lose my waiver benefits. Having the knowledge of resources and the many services to help people work while maintaining benefits would have made all the difference.

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Unfortunately, I have also experienced a lot of inaccessibility in my community. For example, when I was in college, I had to advocate for myself repeatedly to secure reasonable accommodations and to address areas of campus that were not accessible. This included inaccessible restrooms, buildings with no elevator, entrances with no automatic door openers, and classrooms with limited space. I also struggled to go out to restaurants or other places in the community because of physical barriers. These barriers made me feel as though people with disabilities were an afterthought.

While I have not personally experienced employment discrimination, I am aware of the challenges people with disabilities face in securing reasonable accommodations. Employers continue to give in to the stereotypes that people with disabilities cannot be productive and that accommodations cost a lot of money. This blatant discrimination denies important opportunities for people with disabilities.

That is why funding the disability inclusion initiative is extremely important and would greatly benefit the state of Minnesota. It would equip people with disabilities and their families with resources to improve self-advocacy and increase knowledge of disability services. From my experience, having more knowledge of programs and how they work has increased my confidence tremendously as a self-advocate. Additionally, it would help businesses see the value of not only employing people with disabilities but also making spaces fully accessible.

It is for the reasons explained above that I urge your support of SF 985. Thank you so much for the opportunity to share my testimony.