



Thomas Page

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Re.: SB 276

Good morning Senator Hilderbrand and members of the Committee:

I wish to urge the public health and welfare committee to pass SB 276 onto the full senate. This bill (if enacted) would:

- Protect blind parents from having a child removed from their custody on the grounds of blindness.
- In cases of removal of a child for causes connected to blindness the bill proscribes that parental supports be employed so a parent might have a reasonable chance to regain custody.
- Clarify any misunderstandings or misconceptions regarding blind parents right to independently raise their children.

In my capacity as President of the National Federation of the Blind of Kansas I have averaged about one phone call a year from a concerned blind parent. In most of these cases some phone calling or letter writing has cleared up whatever misunderstanding that the person was experiencing with their local doctor, hospital, school, social worker, day care provider, or whomever was questioning their rights to parent. In other cases, we have sent a blind volunteer to be present as an advocate at the hospital or to court proceedings etc. In one fairly recent case we retained a lawyer to help a blind couple regain custody of their child.

I first became aware of this issue over 10 years ago. I received a phone call from a young lady who I had already been working with as an advocate in her vocational rehabilitation process. This call was certainly not the routine advocacy request. She informed me that her rehabilitation counselor had told her that she needed to “do what she was being told to do “or “I”; have your

baby taken away”. You can imagine my shock to hear of such a threat. The young lady was nearly to give birth to her first child and she was placed into a state of panic over her counselor’s threat. I did what I could to investigate and reported my findings to the then director of vocational rehabilitation. The family was so concerned that they decided that the best thing to do was to send the young woman to deliver her child in another state where they had family to advocate for her directly.

I am attaching the data sheet that we have previously sent to the committee. Thank you for considering this bill.

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Parents Rights Bill Data Sheet

To many outside the blind community the idea that a child could be arbitrarily removed from a blind parent based only on their blindness sounds impossible. Below are a few references that summarize how it can happen and a summary of complaints and concerns that have come from NFB of Kansas members

2010 – State of MO takes baby from parents for 67 days...

<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/missouri-takes-baby-blind-parents/story?id=11263491>

2018 – Blind Oregon parents face unfair accusations...

<https://ktvl.com/news/local/blind-parents-face-unfounded-accusations-regarding-newborn>

2018 – NFB of Kansas succeeds in helping blind parents regaining custody...

In this case we helped two of our members regain custody of their child after unfair removal during custody dispute.

2019 – Donna Wood our 2nd Vice President received a complaint regarding unfair child welfare evaluation from a member. When the member demanded a retest, the results were reversed.

Sadly, we continue to receive requests to have a member accompany blind parents to the hospital at birth. We do our best to help those new parents and their new babies. Recent complaints have helped illustrate that there are more points at which a blind parent might feel their rights being threatened than at birth and in divorce proceedings. Below are some links to information on blind parenting.

What it's like to be a blind parent... CNN.com

<https://www-m.cnn.com/2014/03/28/living/blind-mothers-real-simple/index.html?r=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2Furl%3Fsa%3Dt%26rct%3Dj%26q%3D%26esrc%3Ds%26source%3Dweb%26cd%3D1%26cad%3Drja%26uact%3D8%26ved%3D2ahUKEwj16OFzPflAhVGJKwKHWBGBE8QFjAAegQIARAB%26url%3Dhttps%253A%252F%252Fwww.cnn.com%252F2014%252F03%252F28%252Fliving%252Fblind-mothers-real-simple%252Findex.html%26usg%3DAOvVaw1VdJaSaOkGJZF9yb8cT6Na&rm=1>

Parenting Without Sight... www.nfb.org

<https://www.nfb.org/images/nfb/publications/brochures/blindparents/parentingwithoutstght.html>