

Fight for Human Rights was lengthy

by [Luther Granquist](#) // August 10th, 2010

The Minnesota House, in 1973, had approved a bill supported by Handi-Registration, a self-advocacy group seeking to protect the civil rights of persons with disabilities. The bill expanded coverage for persons with disabilities in all areas covered by the Minnesota Human Rights Act. The Senate, however, refused to extend coverage in public services to persons with disabilities and, regarding public accommodations, only outlawed discrimination by taxicab companies. In 1975, the group, then known as Independence for Impaired Individuals, supported Rep. Russell Stanton's proposal to provide coverage for persons with disabilities in both these sections of the law. LeAnne Nelson (now LeAnne Dahl) and Mel Duncan testified in support of this bill, as did Bob Tuttle from the St. Paul ARC. The bill passed the House unanimously and the Senate by a vote of 44-1. That widespread support was possible only because the bill also specified that no person could be required to modify property in any way. This provision reflected a concern at the time that costly accommodations might be ordered.



During that session these advocates also sought to amend the Human Rights Act to make it an unfair discriminatory practice for an insurance company to deny or to charge more for coverage because a person has a disability unless actuarial data supported that action. To overcome opposition from insurance companies, Sen. Skip Humphrey, who carried the bill, agreed to place these provisions in the unfair practices section of the insurance law instead of in the Human Rights Act. In support of the bill, Nelson told the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee that an insurance agent attempted to get insurance coverage for her, but the insurance company refused because she had cerebral palsy. She pointed out that her condition was stable and that in 36 years she had not been hospitalized once. The Senate approved the bill by a vote of 59-0; the House by 126-0.

The 1973 Legislature had created the Minnesota Commission for the Handicapped, now called the State Council on Disability. The Commission supported both 1975 bills. Regarding the insurance proposal, Dick Ramberg, then Deputy Director of the Commission, informed the Senate committee that a survey the commission did in January 1975 underscored Nelson's testimony about discrimination against persons with disabilities seeking insurance coverage.

The State Council for the Handicapped, as it was called in 1983, and the Department of Human Services joined forces that year to close some of the gaps remaining in the laws passed in the 1970s. Patti Hague from the State Council and Mary Hartle from the Department testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee in support of a proposal introduced by Sen. Allan Spear to incorporate requirements from the federal Section 504

Regulations into the state Human Rights Act.

His bill, which passed by a margin of 58-0 in the Senate and 117-3 in the House, broadened protections in the Act regarding program access and physical access. The bill also included requirements for reasonable accommodation in the employment section, but, as approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee, any accommodations for a job applicant which cost more than \$2,000 were deemed unreasonable. On the Senate floor that amount was lowered to \$50. Even with that limitation, however, aggressive advocacy over a decade ensured that by 1983 the state Human Rights Act provided persons with disabilities in Minnesota far broader protection than they would have had in many other states.