

Then as now, award winner spoke out for our rights

by [Luther Granquist](#) // October 10th, 2012

2012 Charlie Smith Award winner Charles Van Heuveln has long been a champion of disability rights. The remarks below by Van Heuveln are excerpted from his testimony of June 21, 1972 to the Minnesota Constitutional Study Commission Bill of Rights Committee.

It's time for all physically impaired people to stick up for their rights and be counted or and to be recognized as first-class citizens.

First of all, we are people who want to be treated as people. As physically handicapped people we should already have the same rights as anyone else but in some areas we are denied these rights. This is why we are here today. We are proposing, that this committee recommend equal protection of the laws and discrimination against people with disabilities because of physical disability. This should never appear as part of a provision guaranteeing equal rights to everyone no matter what race, color, creed, national origin, religious opinion, sex, physical or mental handicap. It is not only time for physically impaired people to stick up for their rights but for the state of Minnesota to recognize their rights.

The term handicap has several different meanings, but when we speak of physical disability, Rep. Charles Vanik of Ohio uses a definition which states "the handicapped are percentage of civilian population experience one or more chronic diseases or impairments over 24 month period." He uses this definition in support of this bill to amend the 1964 Civil Rights Act to include physically disabled. 40 million Americans fit this definition. 22 million people have a physical disabling condition severe not to interfere with their major daily activity. Each year hundred thousand babies are born with defects that will force them to use crutches, braces our wheelchair all their lives.

To guarantee that discrimination in this, it is necessary for the Minnesota state constitution to recognize specifically our equal rights.

We want to be able to stress our abilities rather than our disabilities. However, under the present legal structure, this is seldom possible.

All that we are asking for is something very simple and that is equal access to our society.

Although there are many areas where we are discriminated against time permits us only to touch on a few. Then spent many hours preparing for this. So although seven of us will be presenting testimony, others of us are opening for questions.

I will speak briefly on some of the areas in which we are discriminated against. Other major areas will be covered by the other witnesses.

In the area of public education, according to the figures obtained by per representative Vanik. of Ohio from the US Department of Education during the school year of 1971 through 72.

Minnesota had 52,242 children with mental, physical or emotional disabilities who were between the ages of zero and 21 were not served. Because of architectural barriers. Students with no mental handicap are required to be passed to schools outside their home areas because you schools are equipped to handle wheelchairs and crutches. Programs within schools need to be updated in increased. Also, counseling needs to become more realistic.

An area that nonphysical handicap people take for granted is signatures. For the person with a physical handicap who is unable to sign his or her name except with an "X". There should be some type of illegal spam instead of trying to find two witnesses every time they have to sign a paper. This process makes it almost impossible for us to have anything like a checking account.

If a person has financial support of any kind is difficult for him to be eligible for aid to the disabled. I think that the handicap person who is over age 21 and a unable to work should be entitled to a to the disabled, no matter of his or her parents financial status.

Insurance of all kinds is one of the most discriminated areas of all handicapped. However, it is also one of the hardest areas to find hard and set policy. There are many examples of where it has been very difficult if not impossible to obtain insurance.

This discrimination mentioned in these areas is not new. However most people are unfamiliar with them because the physical handicap person as few places to turn for adequate legal assistance.

Presently in the St. Paul human rights commission and the state human rights department say that they cannot handle these problems because of the enabling legislation does not include physical disabilities as one as the discriminated against categories.

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