

In Support of Community & Family Living Amendments to S2053:

My name is Bob Jirik and I want to say that I agree with the Community and Family Living Amendments to Senator Chafee's Bill, S2053. I think that my story is proof that handicapped individuals can become productive members of society if they are given a chance and are not just shoved into the corners of institutions.

I have a learning disability called "word blindness", a form of dyslexia, that causes me to see words in reverse order. When I was young, there were no special education programs to help me read. Instead, when I was still school age, state personnel wanted to institutionalize me.

After I got out of school, I worked at a number of jobs such as setting pins at bowling alleys and caddying at golf courses. For a while, I was hired to carry books to legislators at the state capitol, but I lost that job when I couldn't pass the written test for clerks.

I wanted to learn to read so I could take care of myself, but my rehabilitation counselor told me to give up the idea. She told me I would never be able to read or write. But Carl Grittner, a school superintendent, arranged for a remedial reading course for me at the University of Minnesota. That's when they found out that I had word blindness.

Mr. Grittner later arranged for a course in remedial reading at Maxfield High School, using the "talking typewriter" method of visual education. The talking typewriter helped me to read somewhat, but not very fluently. About that time, I got a job at the Emporium Department Store in St. Paul. When the Emporium closed, I got a job as a janitor at Sperry Corporation. After

a few years, I was promoted to stock attendant, even though my reading ability was somewhat limited. But my supervisor helped me and by sheer determination I was able to handle the job.

Meanwhile, I found a reading method that has helped me further. I go to school one night a week and a special tutor gives me a lesson using the Laubach method, used by the Martin Luther King Foundation.

I was pushed into a corner until well along in life. But in spite of all this, and because I refused to give up, I am now a taxpayer and not a burden on the state. I am presently serving on the Minnesota Governor's Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities and am on a special advisory committee for the mayor of St. Paul.

I am 63 years old and still want to learn so very much. It hasn't been easy. The trouble is that many people don't even have a chance to prove themselves. They are put into institutions and drugged to keep calm. Their minds become twisted and they feel hopeless. I think they need a chance. I also think that less severely handicapped people could be used as overseers in helping them make the transition from institutional to non-institutional life. Everybody deserves a chance. I think that this bill would help give it to them.



Robert J. Jirik

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