



February 5, 2018

To: Senate Committee on Human Services  
From: Jennifer Santiago, Community Pathways, Inc.

Re: Support for SB 1526, Prohibiting courts from considering parent's disability in determining whether to terminate parental rights, absent additional findings

Chair Gelser and members of the committee,

As the Director of an agency that supports adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and as a parent, I'm writing to you in support of SB 1526. Too often in my career of working with adults with varying abilities, I have heard that someone's ability to parent should be questioned solely because they are labeled as being diagnosed with a disability.

My most recent example is from a Personal Agent (case manager) at our agency, who told me he had received a call from Child Protective Services wondering if the person we support is able to adequately parent. The CPS worker stated he/she had been informed that the person we support had recently had a baby and also has a disability. I asked the Personal Agent, also a new father, what definition any of us use to know that we have the ability to parent. There are no tests that told me I could adequately take care of my daughter, and I don't know of any test that would tell us if the woman we support can adequately care for her daughter. It is not for us to prejudge, but instead to monitor and support the family to be safe and thrive. Parenthood is a gift, and she should be given the opportunity, like anyone, to be equal to the task.

Disability, alone, should never be a reason to discredit a parent. As a mandatory reporter, I will report any and all abuse that I see or suspect. The same is true for the Personal Agent. If we suspect abuse, in any way, we are legally and morally, obligated to report it. This is the safety net that exists for all children. Children being raised by parents with a disability already have the extra safety net of a caseworker being involved. I support SB 1526, because I believe it is critical to ensure we are not singling out a particular population for discrimination.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Santiago  
Executive Director  
Community Pathways, Inc.