

April 3, 2025

Gene Martinez
Legislative Advocacy Coordinator
The Arc Minnesota
641 Fairview Ave N, Ste 195
St Paul, MN 55104

RE: Testimony in Support of HF 501, Minnesota Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) from The Arc Minnesota

Dear Co-Chairs Klevorn and Nash and members of the House State Government Finance and Policy Committee,

My name is Gene Martinez and I am the Legislative Advocacy Coordinator for The Arc Minnesota. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HF 501, which would place a Constitutional Amendment on the November 2026 General Election Ballot to have voters decide whether to pass a Minnesota Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).

Founded by parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in 1946, The Arc Minnesota is a statewide nonprofit organization that promotes and protects the human rights of people who have IDD, supporting them and their families in a lifetime of inclusion and participation in their communities. We believe people who have disabilities are inherently strong, powerful, capable, and resilient. The lived experience of people with disabilities guides our policy priorities.

A Minnesota Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) that explicitly prohibits discrimination based on disability would greatly benefit the disability community. Over Minnesota history, people with disabilities have faced barriers in employment, education, housing, and public accommodations—barriers that limit opportunities and independence. While federal laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act provide protections, state-level constitutional recognition would strengthen these rights, ensuring that people with disabilities are treated with the same dignity and fairness as everyone else.

This amendment would help close gaps in enforcement, making it easier to challenge discrimination in court and hold institutions accountable. It would also signal a clear commitment from Minnesota that discrimination against disabled individuals is not just illegal, it is unconstitutional. This shift would encourage more inclusive policies, better accessibility, and greater economic and social opportunities for the disability community.

This amendment would send a powerful message: that Minnesota values and prioritizes the rights and contributions of all its residents, regardless of ability. It's about fairness, justice, and ensuring that every person has an equal chance to thrive. We are confident this Amendment, if passed, would greatly benefit the disability community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HF 501. I am available for questions if you have any.

Sincerely,

Gene Martinez
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