Please accept my written testimony for [HF 2930](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/bill.php?b=house&f=HF2930&ssn=0&y=2023) "Improving the Health and Wellness of People with Disabilities."

I was born with a neuromuscular disability called spinal muscular atrophy, which has a serious effect on my respiratory health. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, it was my worst case scenario come true. Prior to the pandemic, I had been hospitalized and intubated twice for acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) as a result of getting pneumonia from the common cold. What this means is that my lungs stopped working and I nearly died. COVID caused all of those horrible memories to resurface constantly. Overnight, the pandemic changed everything for me. Before it happened, I lived independently, worked full time in Downtown Minneapolis, and used public transit all the time to get out in the community and be an active participant in social and civic life. After March 6, 2020, I was forced to give up my apartment and move in with my aging parents, let go of all of my direct support staff, work remotely, and never leave my parents' home. My life became smaller, more constrained, and deadly if I tried to go out in public. Throughout the pandemic, I witnessed the shortcomings of the state and federal COVID response for people with disabilities. When the vaccine became available, I watched hopelessly as people with disabilities who were younger than 65 years old were not prioritized for access. When therapeutics became available, I bore helpless witness to my friends with disabilities being denied treatment because they did not meet mnRAP criteria, even though they were at extreme high risk. Each new day brought stories of people with disabilities being allowed to die because doctors determined that their "quality of life" was so low it was not worth saving. Rumors circulated among my friends of acquaintances in group homes and assisted living facilities were cruelly isolated in the name of disease prevention - rumors that later proved to be true when it was discovered that these facilities misapplied MDH and CDC guidance. In February 2022, I began working for the Minnesota Department of Health in a capacity that allowed me to help my division respond to the needs of people with disabilities in or pandemic response work. I have witnessed hopeful changes and colleagues work diligently to repair the harm that the public health system has inflicted on people with disabilities. To ensure that these things never happen again, I implore the legislature to fund the "Improving the Health and Wellness of People with Disabilities" budget proposal. Thank you.

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Rachel Garaghty (she/her)