

Dear House Health Finance and Policy Committee,

My name is Nathan Mayer. I am 23 years old and am a recent graduate of the University of Minnesota with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Product Design, I am currently a User Experience Designer at Best Buy Corporate, and I also currently represent the United States in the sport of soccer. By those credentials, and by society standards/expectations, this next sentence may be unexpected, but I also have a physical disability, Spinal Muscular Atrophy, that requires me to use a complex power wheelchair to get around, to be a contributor to society, and to live life like everyone else.

I am writing in response to the DME and medical supplies proposed budget cuts. I first want to express how disappointed I am that this is even a consideration. From day one, I have been getting told no, or told that I would not be a contributing member of society only because I have a disability. At the age of eight months, which was the age at which I was diagnosed, my parents and I were told that I wouldn't live past the age of two. After I surpassed that doubt, I was told, going into elementary school, that I shouldn't be in a mainstream classroom because I used a wheelchair, needed a couple assistive technology devices to help me thrive in the classroom, and needed to have a formula mixture put into my feeding tube once a day at school to keep me nourished and hydrated, even though, intellectually, everything is fine. While going through school, I vividly remember being constantly told that I couldn't be in advanced classes. I am a very competitive person, so those challenges of being told that I couldn't, or I shouldn't, or I wouldn't, was the driving force in why I set out to prove those assumptions wrong.

Everyone, disability or not, desires to be independent in the things that they do. With having a disability, that may require a little more assistance than normal, but at the end of the day, that desire for independence is still the same. Everything that I just stated above would not have been possible without the help of medical equipment and assistive technology. As mentioned, I use a power wheelchair that has allowed me to be a normal kid outside with friends and family, has allowed me to get from one class to another on the great University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus, and hopefully, once the pandemic settles and life begins to really return to normal, will allow me to get to different meetings with co-workers at Best Buy. Eating is not impossible, but it's difficult to a point where I need assistance with nutrition/hydration from a special formula that is mixed with a variety of specific supplements. I have needed many miscellaneous pieces of assistive technology devices including modules to help me run my phone independently, or a robotic arm to help me grab, and access, different things independently to name a couple of things.

That was to give you context in why I am writing to you on this matter. I am a contributing member to society even with my disability and no expectations to do so. As you have read, or heard, that has not been easy; going through life has not been easy because of my disability, for me or my family, but the medical equipment and assistive technology has allowed me to go through life a little easier and not have me think about how hard life could be without this equipment. Who wants to go through life constantly experiencing how hard things are on a

physical level, meaning not being able to get out of bed and move around, when there is equipment out there to help with that? My family didn't/doesn't have that kind of money to afford the type of equipment, and without the type of programs/funding that you're trying to cut, I wouldn't be a college grad and have a job that will have me paying taxes. Financial opportunities/smart strategies for people with disabilities is for another conversation, but I took a couple of business classes in college, so I understand the want to save funding, but this matter is about people's lives, not just my own, and how you're going to make it very difficult for families and individuals to thrive in spite of their circumstance.

I close with this; I kept trying to figure out why I was treated the way I was in school regarding being told I couldn't, and I think I figured it out. It was the easy answer; it was easy to tell me no and not think outside the box, and that's many things with disabilities in the eyes of the public; it's easy to think that people with disabilities don't need or want things like everybody else. I don't do easy, I embrace a challenge and move forward regardless of my disability, and I ask you to do the same. People with disabilities can contribute to society and be like everyone else; we just may need some equipment to help us. Please, don't make life harder for us than it already is regarding getting this equipment.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nathan Mayer". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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