



ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY CENTERS ON DISABILITIES
THE LEADERSHIP, EDUCATION, ADVOCACY & RESEARCH NETWORK

**Written Testimony of Elizabeth (Liz) Weintraub
Senior Advocacy Specialist
Association of University Centers on Disabilities**

**Before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Regarding Nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court of the United
States**

September 7, 2018

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Thank you, Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Feinstein and the members of the Judiciary Committee for this honor to speak with you today about the nomination of Judge Kavanaugh to the US Supreme Court.

My name is Liz Weintraub. I want to tell you a little bit about who I am.

I was born in 1966 with cerebral palsy and an intellectual disability. Fifty-one years ago, I entered a world that had low expectations for me and people like me. Professionals told families like mine that they should put me in an institution. They said that I might distract attention away from my healthy sisters if I was raised at home, that I could never go to college, that I could never get married, that I could never have a career, and that I could never have my own family.

I am proud to tell you that, thanks to a loving family and so many wonderful friends who helped me believe in myself, I have achieved more than many thought possible for someone like me. I work full-time for the Association of University Centers on Disabilities as the Senior Advocacy Specialist. I have also been the host of “Tuesdays With Liz: Disability Policy for All,” a weekly YouTube series for almost three years. I talk to people about policy in a way that people with intellectual disabilities can understand.

In addition to my title at work, I am very proud to say that I am a friend, a sister and an aunt. However, the title that I am the most proud of is being a wife to a wonderful man who also happens to have a disability.

My parents, who are no longer here, helped me to become the person I am today. I come from a family where the dinner table conversations were about politics and policy.

From an early age, I was always interested in policy. So when my parents asked me what I wanted to do for a job, I said, “I want to be a lobbyist.” My parents thought that was funny, because they never imagined how a person with an intellectual disability could be a lobbyist. I wanted to go to college, like most of my friends did.

Instead, some professionals and my parents thought it would be a good idea for me to be placed into a private institution. Without me being a part of the decision, or even including me in the conversation, they decided that I should live in an institution.

In this place, I was surrounded by other people with disabilities, and separated from my family and from the community.

This was wrong.

My parents loved me. They were good people, and they were only listening to professionals who wanted what was best for me. But, instead of treating me like an adult with opinions and preferences and asking what I wanted, they made the decision for me, like a child.

I have spent the majority of my adult life fighting to be treated like an adult, to be taken seriously when I expressed my wishes, and only in the last fifteen years or so has that started to happen. People with intellectual disabilities have opinions and preferences and they should be recognized.

In the self-advocacy community, there is a saying that we hold very dear to our hearts, and that is “nothing about us without us.” This means that if there is a decision of any kind about us, we expect to be part of the conversation; even to lead the conversation!

It is important to know that the idea of self-determination is for ALL people with disabilities, including those who communicate in ways that you all are not used to.

As a twenty-two-year-old woman, I was left out of a discussion that my family had about my future. And to make it worse, my parents asked a cousin to “babysit” me, so I would not go downstairs to hear what the meeting was about. I felt very upset. Just because of my disability, they excluded me from that meeting.

Excluding me from decisions about me has happened throughout my life. The institution where I lived got me a job, without consulting me, in a sheltered

workshop. A sheltered workshop is a place where people with disabilities are kept together, can be paid less than minimum wage, and are given work that is often not meaningful. When I told my family I hated the job at the workshop, I was moved to a job in a library and told that all I could ever be was a person who put books away on the shelf. I got to do that job, which was a great job, but that was not the job that I wanted, or a job that I chose.

Today, I live with my husband in the community and I have a career that I have always dreamt about. Now I get to come to Capitol Hill and advocate for policies that will improve the lives of me and my friends in the disability community. For four months earlier this year, I was honored to do a fellowship in the Senate so I could see what it was like being on the other side of the table from advocates. Now I am working to make it possible for more people with intellectual disabilities to work on the Hill.

Judge Kavanaugh's nomination matters to me.

When I read the decision in the Doe vs DC case, it made me very upset, because Judge Kavanaugh's decision completely disrespected people's rights and their freedom of choice because of their disability.

This is wrong.

All adults deserve to be treated like grown-ups and have the power to make decisions about their lives, especially when it is about their own bodies.

The lower court in Doe told the DC government that it needed to ask people with intellectual disabilities if they wanted certain medical treatments. That requirement respects the civil rights of people with disabilities.

Judge Kavanaugh could have supported the civil rights of people with disabilities and this requirement, *but he failed*. He said that when a medical decision needed to be made, people with intellectual disabilities did not even get a chance to say what they wanted.

Judge Kavanaugh took away the civil rights that the disabled women who brought that case were fighting for. Our country is founded on liberty and justice for all and *All means All!*

People with disabilities often face discrimination. Because of my intellectual disability, I am still sometimes treated like a child who cannot make my own decisions.

Recently, when my husband and I went to renew our lease, the apartment management company did not want to talk to us. Instead, they wanted to talk to my service provider or my sister. My husband and I both have professional jobs. We live on our own and pay our own rent. But people disrespect us and do not expect us to make our own decisions.

This year I was diagnosed with diabetes, a new health condition that comes with lots of new directions about my diet. I am sure that my service provider and my doctors may be worried about my ability to control my diabetes. I expect to be involved in all of the decisions about how I will manage this new condition, and I expect to be able to ask questions until I understand what I need to do. I am fearful that some people will try to make decisions without me, and I will fight that.

Everyone, regardless of their abilities, needs support and help to make decisions. When judges are appointed to the Supreme Court, they are supposed to protect the rights of all citizens of this great country, and that includes people with intellectual disabilities. We are adults who have civil rights, too.

Since the Supreme Court is the highest court of the land, I worry that if a Justice on the Supreme Court does not believe that we, as people with intellectual disabilities, CAN MAKE decisions for ourselves, then we will have the right to make those decisions taken away from us. We will not be able to make any kind of decision for ourselves.

That is why I am opposing Judge Kavanaugh.

I do not want to go back to when people like me were expected to live our lives in institutions, with no opportunities to have a meaningful life in the community.

People do not grow in institutions, and we all deserve a chance to grow as adults.

If Judge Kavanaugh is appointed to the Supreme Court, I am afraid that for generations to come my right to make decisions for myself will be taken away.

I ask you, for myself and as a representative of the disability community, when you vote on Judge Kavanaugh, please do not vote to take away the civil rights that I and other people with disabilities have fought for.

Thank you again for believing that I had something important to say about Judge Kavanaugh's nomination.