

RE: Support for HB 1593-FN – Relative to Nondiscrimination Due to Disability

Dear Chair Lynn and Members of the Committee,

My name is Gretchen Fishman, and I am a resident of Salem. Thank you for hearing my oral testimony this afternoon; I wanted to follow up with my written statement and ask for you to vote **Ought to Pass** on **HB 1593-FN**.

For my family, this bill is not about legal theory - it is about the physical and emotional safety of my children. My children have personally experienced educational neglect and trauma caused by discrimination within systems that were supposed to protect them. I know firsthand the feeling of being trapped in a system where rights exist on paper, but there is no accessible way to enforce them.

HB 1593-FN provides a much-needed "New Hampshire Shield" that increases benefits for the state in four critical ways:

1. It Protects Every Granite Stater, Including Our Veterans

This bill is designed to be inclusive of **all** otherwise qualified individuals with a disability in New Hampshire . This explicitly includes our **disabled veterans** who rely on state-funded vocational programs, healthcare facilities, and local government services . Our veterans sacrificed their well-being for our freedom; they should not return home only to find that their access to state programs depends on a crumbling federal legal framework. HB 1593-FN ensures that those who serve have a clear, state-level path to justice if they encounter barriers to the benefits and services they earned.

2. It Closes the "College Gap" and Protects Healthcare Access

Currently, while New Hampshire's Law Against Discrimination (RSA 354-A) covers K-12 public schools, it does not explicitly provide the New Hampshire Commission for Human Rights with authority over higher education institutions . HB 1593-FN fixes this by covering all postsecondary institutions and healthcare providers receiving state or federal assistance. This ensures that whether a resident is seeking a degree at a community college or life-saving treatment at a hospital, they are protected by New Hampshire law.

Current NH law mainly covers **Employment, Housing, and Public Accommodations** (like restaurants or shops). It does not have a broad category for "Programs or Activities receiving state aid," which is the catch-all protection that Section 504 provides.

3. It Shields NH from Federal Legal Volatility

As we speak, nine states are actively suing in federal court to weaken core disability protections. If these lawsuits succeed, the federal safety net my children, disabled adults, and

our veterans rely on could be shredded. By codifying these standards into New Hampshire law, we ensure that Granite Staters remain protected regardless of what happens in a federal courtroom 1,500 miles away.

4. It Removes the Financial Barrier to Justice

The trauma of discrimination is compounded when a family cannot afford to fight back. HB 1593-FN codifies the right to **reasonable attorney's fees** for prevailing parties. This is essential because it allows families and veterans to hold large institutions accountable without having to go bankrupt to do so.

In conclusion, HB 1593-FN brings disability protections home. It moves the center of gravity from Washington, D.C., to Concord, allowing our own courts and our own agencies to protect our own citizens - from our children in classrooms to our veterans in our communities.

I ask you to stand with New Hampshire families and veterans and vote **Ought to Pass**.

Sincerely,
Gretchen Fishman
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