

Jeffrey A. Nurick
9450 Garfield Ave. S. Apt 202
Bloomington, MN 55420
Phone 952.948.0123
E-mail: jnadvocate@msn.com

September 5, 2007

Members of the Commission on Poverty:

My name is Jeffrey Nurick and I have Cerebral Palsy. As a member of the larger disability community I consider it an honor to speak to you today. I graduated 4th in my high school class, received my Bachelors degree with a 3.3 GPA, was inducted into the National Social Science Honor Society and completed an Internship at the White House during the Clinton Administration. I also completed 2 years of service in an AmeriCorps program in Minneapolis. Like you, I'm proud of my accomplishments, but now I just want to obtain full time and meaningful employment. I have invested a lot of time, money and energy in my future, and right now I'm feeling that it is all in vain.

Unfortunately, the unemployment rate amongst people with disabilities is overwhelming. Most of us are collecting Social Security and other government benefits just to survive. However, this is about much more than just money. If that's all it is, we can all go home and resume life as normal. The truth of it is that it's about being accepted, being respected, making a contribution and waking up in the morning looking forward to going to work. When people socialize what is one of the first things they ask? Well, what do you do? How is an unemployed person with a disability supposed to respond and sound intelligent? My whole life I was told that I needed to get a good education in order to be a productive person. Sure, it is easier to open up a mailbox every month and collect your welfare check, but I'm here to tell you, that's not what most people with disabilities want to do. I don't know about you, but I would rather earn my check. That is one of my most important values.

I have the education, the experience, the drive and motivation. I've applied for numerous jobs but have not yet secured one. I've been rejected by the private sector, not-for-profits, and government agencies. Let me tell you, this is one area where there is no discrimination. My county vocational counselor suggested that I become a greeter at a supermarket or discount chain. I know what I can accomplish and what my capabilities are, but employers and even many well meaning advocates for the disabled can't seem to get past my wheelchair and speech impediment.

Now very briefly, let me mention employment in the Non-profit and government agencies whose mission it is to help people with disabilities. Yes, I'm talking about the likes of Easter Seals, United Cerebral Palsy, RISE, Inc., and multiple government agencies. These are examples only and I'm not singling them out. Some are better than others, but believe it or not, the great majority of their workers in meaningful jobs are able bodied and most disabled workers, with

Jeffrey A. Nurick
9450 Garfield Ave. S. Apt 202
Bloomington, MN 55420
Phone 952.948.0123
E-mail: jnadvocate@msn.com

few exceptions, have relatively minor disabilities. Fulfilling their mission with INTEGRITY means HIRING people like me, and not just in their sheltered work shops either.

I've met and surpassed many challenges in my life and I am determined to find a meaningful, fulfilling job where I can help my employer meet their organization's goals and objectives. On a daily basis I am constantly searching websites, networking, going to meetings, volunteering and speaking to people. As an educated and experienced person with a physical disability I am uniquely qualified to connect with a diverse population. I am constantly being told by colleagues, clients and managers that I motivate and inspire others to excel. I would like a chance to do this in a paid setting now.

The late Justin Dart JR, better known as the father of the Americans with Disabilities Act, had a famous quote that I would like to share. "Get off your ass and play God." Furthermore, Joel Barker, a futurist once said "Vision without action is just daydreaming. Action without vision is merely biding time. But vision plus action can change the world!" I feel the presence of these two fine gentlemen here today, shaking their heads in disappointment at our society. I too have a dream, similar to Martin Luther King. I see the day when all people, able bodied and disabled, work together, live together, and are happy together.

If, in any way I inspired you today, I leave you with one question. When you leave today's meeting, what are you going to do to ensure you are giving everyone, of all abilities, a chance to show their true merits, who they really are, and what they can truly do?