

Testimony: SB 189
Senate Assessment & Taxation Committee
February 19, 2013

My name is Brent Kirkhart and I am from Salina, Ks. I taught and coached for 16 years and I was a claims adjuster for the last 12 ½ years. I was diagnosed with MS in January 1997. I had to get out of the coaching because the heat was really affecting me. I just recently went on “medical retirement” (disability) from the claims adjusting. I wasn’t able to perform my job sufficiently and the days were wearing on me. I wasn’t too crazy about doing that, but my neurologist, Dr. Sharon Lynch, told me that I need to think of myself and as well as my family. She said that I have gone longer than I probably should have and definitely longer than most people would have.

Last summer, I had some home modifications done to my home. The flooring from our kitchen to our living room was an inch and a half (1½”) higher. I had the flooring made level to make an easy transition. You wouldn’t think that would be much of a difference and it wouldn’t normally for someone who doesn’t have problems walking; but, because I use a cane and can’t raise my feet up very high, they drag and I would almost always catch one of my feet on the elevated part. I had even fallen a couple of times. When I used my chair the raised portion was hard for the chair to make the transition. I had my bathroom modified with wider doors so my chair could fit through. I also had a walk-in shower with hand supports and a seat that lowers installed. The tub/shower I had before was difficult getting in and out of and I had slipped a few times trying to catch my balance getting in or out. I had a raised toilet installed along with a hand rail to make it easier to sit. The bathroom counter was raised so that an electric chair would fit under it to make it easier to use the sink. I had a ramp installed in the front of my house. My wife’s family did it for me a couple of Thanksgivings ago. They saw the trouble I was having going up and down the steps and I did not have any way of getting my electric chair in or out of the house.

At first I just thought the modifications were for me, but it actually was for my whole family. It gives them comfort and piece of mind knowing that I am safer and things are easier for me to get around in the house. It was hard seeing the hurt and concern on their faces for me. I’m a guy and I don’t like asking for help. I’ve been able to do things without asking and now that I can’t do the things that I once could, it is very humbling and took a while before I learned how to ask for help. I have a 13 year-old son who has never seen me run. It’s hard for me to watch him try to learn to do some things just by being told and someone not being able to show him. I longed for the day when Tyler was younger that I could play ball with him and I enjoyed taking walks with my wife. I can still do some of those things, but from my electric chair. Because of the home modifications that I have done and am going to have done, I get to stay in my home longer with my family and not have to go to a long-term care facility. I don’t want that to ever happen, but the more I have to rely on someone else the more of a chance that may happen. If I’m able to maneuver around in my home easier and do things for myself the longer I will get to be at home.

(over)

Because of the recent home modifications, I don't see the hurt on my family's faces for me – and the more fun family times we get to share together. *Having a tax credit really helps with the expense and, knowing that they are getting some financial assistance, more people will likely take advantage of the home modifications so that they can stay in their homes longer with their families and not have to go to a long-term care facility.*