

Emmanuel Smith

HELP Committee Testimony

Olmstead 6/24/14

Thank-you Senators for having me here today. My name is Emmanuel Smith and I work currently at Disability Rights Iowa. It's certainly an honor to be asked to speak on a law, and by extension a Supreme Court decision which I believe plays an important role in my life.

I have brittle bone disease, and have broken nearly fifty bones. As much as I hate to tempt fate, I will almost certainly break many more. In addition, I have several sub-diseases that could, through time or sudden injury, limit my ability to live and work independently to the degree I am currently able, and overnight drastically increase my need for services. I grew up with this understanding, and I live with this understanding.

As a child from a single parent household, I knew that the family supports I depended on could not last forever. And should, for whatever reason, those family supports fall away just as I was facing significant health issues, it was well within the realm of possibility that I would end up in a nursing home. Thankfully, Olmstead addresses that fear directly through the principle it reinforces and the legal protections it affords me.

Through Olmstead, I have a clearly defined right to receive the services I need without sacrificing my place in society needlessly. I'm no longer forced to put my dignity, or safety, in the hands of those who may not have my interests at heart. My work with the P and A network has introduced me to a host of attorneys and advocates who will protect me from that, using the legal avenues Olmstead affords them.

Agency is everything. The feeling that success is possible, and I and I alone get to shape my life. It is what has enabled me to throw myself fully into my work, and build something lasting and meaningful come what may. To tell young people with disabilities to have high expectations and work towards independence while denying them the supports necessary for basic human dignity later in life would be unfair and frankly poisonous. That is why we need Olmstead.

Olmstead is not an embellishment of the ADA, or an addition tacked on through the courts. It is a defense of what Justin Dart Jr called a "landmark commandment of fundamental human morality". That as an American, I have the right to live as I wish, work in a field derived from my passions, and all within a home not just with family, but of my making. A home I spent countless hours in half body casts dreaming of. Most importantly, I believe that my community is made better for having me, for having diversity of all kinds. If nothing else, the ADA is predicated on the idea that we all benefit from living together, and operating in stewardship to

one another. Olmstead insures that inclusion for generations of people with disabilities, and I so greatly appreciate you all taking the time to explore its incredible human impact and lasting importance.

Thank-you.