

## The Price of Awareness

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ROCHESTER, MN -- As one of the first cities in the country to provide Autism awareness signs, Rochester places itself at the front of the fight for disability awareness.

But a new plan to charge parents who want similar signs, is stirring up an emotional fight.

It isn't the first time city council members have had to make a decision about blind, deaf, or autistic child signs.

It was less than two years ago that they made a name for themselves by offering the autistic child signs.

Now concerns about price and effectiveness has them rethinking their policy and some parents feeling taken advantage of.

6 year old Reece Trahan has Autism and anyone who drives past his house in northeast Rochester knows it.

Father Brad Trahan says, "It's about life and death and we want to use every tool we have out there to help save our children and you know what, I really don't think that's asking a whole lot."

To some members of city staff, it is asking too much.

That's why they're proposing a new ordinance that would charge 200-dollars for the installation of any blind, deaf, or autistic child sign.

In addition the family requesting the sign would be charged an annual 5-dollar fee and only be allowed to have the sign until their child was 16 years old.

Donna Garratt has a 21 year old autistic son, "Ryan is 21 and obviously autism doesn't go away at 16."

Trahan says, "I've had one person say what are the signs made of gold?"

The proposed ordinance says the 200-dollar fee would be about half the cost of materials and installation.

A letter coming from the department of public works explains some of the cities other concerns.

It says the signs offer a false sense of security and eventually they become a novelty act that motorists don't notice.

Council member Bob Nowicki says, "There can be some implications when you do a sign for somebody. It can be distracting for instance. I'm not saying these are but they can be, that's the fear."

Parents against the ordinance say the signs do much more than warn motorists.

Trahan says he's received support from medical and police personal who say they would approach a home differently if they knew a disabled child could be inside.

He says, "Our whole neighborhood now, we've kind of formed a protective blanket around Reece."

Trahan doesn't want to see that blanket become such an expensive option for others.

For now his arguments have been enough to stop the ordinance, at least temporarily.

Nowicki says, "We want to just make sure when we're doing it we do it with a completely open mind."

Monday night the council decided to table the ordinance indefinitely.

They're waiting to hear back from city staff about things like the specific cost of signs, and some examples of what other communities are doing.

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