

**Testimony of Christa Bucks Camacho
Before the House Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on the Constitution**

April 24, 2012

Chairman Franks, Vice-chairman Pence, and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me to share with you some personal experiences that may be of relevance as you consider H.R. 4256, The Pool Safety and Accessibility for Everyone Act.

I am Christa Bucks Camacho. I have a significant disability and I have been swimming all my life. My parents started taking me to swimming classes when I was six months old. Later, as my ability to walk progressed slowly, swimming became an increasingly important means of exercise for me. That exercise eventually helped me to walk for a number of years.

During middle school, I spent roughly a year in a full-body brace following surgery. I studied at home with a tutor, but I missed school and I missed swimming. When my doctor said I could swim as long as I kept the brace on, swimming enabled me to resume socializing with other children in normal and fun ways and it helped me regain muscle strength I had lost as a result of the surgery. Thank you, mom, for making a swim suit that fit over that brace.

Swimming enabled me to begin doing things out of the water that I had been unable to do before. I could go to the bathroom unassisted. I could independently get into and out of a car. I could get into and out of bed without help. *Swimming thus helped me to become independent and it has helped keep me independent ever since.*

In recent years, when I broke both of my legs, I could not swim. However, when the casts were removed, the doctor prescribed water therapy. I went to the pool almost daily for a month to heal. The water enabled me to be able to move my legs with minimal pain and, once again, regain my independence.

I am the mother of two children. During pregnancy, exercise can be important to the health of the child as well as the mother. I swam throughout both my pregnancies. It was my primary form of exercise and a great way to relieve stress.

Swimming continues to be a very important part of my life. I started taking my children to swim classes when they were six months old. I would ride the lift into the pool and another parent would hand my child to me. We have become a swimming family. My son, now seven, goes to swimming practice several times a week. I take full advantage of this to get in my own exercise. While he practices in one part of the pool, I swim in another.

I share these stories to illustrate the point that, while swimming can be good for anyone, it is extremely important to the physical, mental, and emotional health of many of the millions of people who have significant disabilities. For us, access to a swimming pool promotes personal

health, social interaction, and family fun, not to mention stress relief. *For many of us, access to a swimming pool means more than having a recreational alternative; it is a quality-of-life issue.* For me, however, access to a swimming pool has not always been easy and, at some facilities, it has been denied.

When I visit a new pool, which usually occurs when I travel, I first look for the equipment I will need in order to get into and out of the pool on my own. My experiences with fixed lifts have always been positive. They are there and easy to spot. They are situated so that I can park my wheelchair close enough to transfer. Lifeguards typically know how to operate the equipment.

A note here about the safety concerns that some have expressed regarding fixed lifts. In my opinion, a fixed lift is no more a hazard to children than any other pool equipment. I say this based on my experience as a parent with young children, who has spent considerable pool time with other parents and their children, and as someone who has taught swimming to children.

My experiences with portable lifts, on the other hand, have often been negative. When near the pool, portable lifts sometimes are in a location that makes it difficult or impossible for me to transfer from my wheelchair. But portable lifts often are not by the pool. When I ask, a portable lift is not always made available even when there is one. When a portable lift is made available, I usually have to show the lifeguards where to hook up the hose or place the battery. For a person with a disability who does not know how to do this, the lift would be effectively unavailable.

For every time that a portable lift has been made available upon request, there has been a time that one was not made available. I have been told that, although a portable lift existed, it had been loaned to another hotel, or was in a storage closet, or could not be used until the battery was charged, which could take hours. When no lift was available, lifeguards refused to help me get into and out of the pool, so the pool was unavailable to me.

My personal experiences are consistent with the years of post-ADA access issues that helped inform the September 2010 Department of Justice rules for ensuring access to swimming pools for people with disabilities. By negating these rules or the ability to enforce them, HR 4256 would: (1) give permission to those who deny such access now to continue doing so; and (2) invite those who have been more careful about providing such access to stop doing so.

Thank you again. I will be pleased to answer any of your questions that I can.