The Irrational Rationality of Rational Basis Review for People with Disabilities: A Call for Intermediate Scrutiny

Jayne Ponder*

INTRODUCTION

Legislative advocacy for people with disabilities culminated in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”) in 1990. The bipartisan bill passed with fanfare and celebration, 377 to 28 in the House and 91 to 6 in the Senate. Speaking before more than 3000 people, President George H.W. Bush praised the ADA as a “historic new civil rights act” and “the world’s first comprehensive declaration of equality for people with disabilities.” The statute endeavored to mitigate the high rates of poverty, joblessness, lack of education, and failure to participate in social life that were reported by people with disabilities in a 1986 nationwide poll. As the Supreme Court had recognized in Alexander v. Choate, discrimination against individuals with disabilities reflects “thoughtlessness and indifference,” and, prior to the ADA, represented one of America’s “shameful oversights” relegating people with disabilities “to live among society ‘shunted aside, hidden, and ignored.’” The ADA responded to the concerns of Americans with disabilities by using its five titles—covering everything from employment to public accommodations—to transform existing paternalistic support structures into new initiatives designed to cultivate equal opportunity, independence, prevention of discrimination, and self-sufficiency. Yet the potential of the ADA has been critically limited in practice because of the Supreme Court’s holding in City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Center that constitu-

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* J.D., Harvard Law School, 2018; B.S., Wake Forest University, 2013.
4 See Louis Harris et al., ICD Survey of Disabled Americans: Bringing Disabled Americans into the Mainstream (1986).
5 Alexander v. Choate, 469 U.S. 287, 295–96 (1985) (describing the problems that motivated members of Congress to act to eliminate the “glaring neglect” of individuals with disabilities).
tional challenges involving people with disabilities should be reviewed through the narrow lens of rational basis review.7

Nevertheless, the ADA remains the centerpiece of the modern disability rights struggle.8 But this is by necessity, not choice. The Court’s decision in Cleburne did more than limit the implementation of the ADA: It also rendered constitutional claims a conspicuously ineffective weapon in the armory of disability advocates who continue to fight for equal rights.

In Cleburne, a 5-4 decision, the Cleburne Living Center submitted a zoning application to build a group home for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The City of Cleburne, Texas denied the permit. On review, the Supreme Court found no rational basis to believe that the group home would pose any threat to the city’s interests and concluded that the denial of the zoning permit “rest[ed] on an irrational prejudice against the mentally retarded.”9 Although the Court struck down the zoning ordinance as infringing on the Equal Protection guarantees, it was a superficial victory. The Court disagreed that intermediate scrutiny was the appropriate standard of review for laws affecting people with disabilities, and endorsed rational basis review instead.10 The Court’s holding has deprived individuals with disabilities and their advocates of a meaningful tool to achieve constitutional equal protection ever since.

Writing for the Court in Cleburne, Justice White’s majority opinion concluded that rational basis review was appropriate because individuals with disabilities are a “large and diversified group” and were amply protected by state legislatures.11 Ironically, with the passage of the ADA, state legislatures had abdicated their role in protecting people with disabilities

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7 See City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Ctr., 473 U.S. 432, 448 (1985) (using rational basis review to evaluate claims that conduct towards people with disabilities is constitutionally impermissible). For an argument that the ADA has “generally” been a successful strategy for people with disabilities, see Michael E. Waterstone, Disability Constitutional Law, 63 Emory L.J. 527, 529 (2014).


9 Cleburne, 473 U.S. at 450.

10 Id.

11 The Majority further opined that “[h]ow this large and diversified group is to be treated under the law is a difficult and often a technical matter, very much a task for legislators guided by qualified professionals, and not by the perhaps ill-informed opinions of the judiciary. Heightened scrutiny inevitably involves substantive judgments about legislative decisions, and we doubt that the predicate for such judicial oversight is present where the classification deals with mental retardation.” Id. at 442–43.
because they assumed the ADA would create and protect federal civil rights for people with disabilities. Whether or not this was true in theory, the Supreme Court’s endorsement of rational basis review in Cleburne has prevented federal rights protection from happening in practice. Due to its highly lenient posture, rational basis review results in irrational consequences for people with disabilities by favoring employers, obfuscating reasonable accommodations, and undermining the achievements of the ADA. Effectively, rational basis guts the ADA’s effectiveness while lulling state legislatures into the false belief that people with disabilities are adequately protected by federal law.

This Note argues that the Court should recognize the inconsistency between rational basis review and the ADA and amend the standard of constitutional review for legislation affecting people with disabilities to intermediate scrutiny. This would provide a formidable constitutional instrument for the advancement of disability rights and more effective implementation of the ADA. This Note proceeds in five parts. Part I provides an overview of the tiers of scrutiny in constitutional cases and examines the Court’s application of an increasingly pro-defendant rational basis review in disability rights cases since Cleburne. Part II uses the case of Board of Trustees of the University of Alabama v. Garrett\(^\text{12}\) to examine the irrationality of rational basis review and the ways it subverts the purpose of the ADA. It then hypothesizes how rational basis review would have changed the outcome of a well-reasoned,\(^\text{13}\) pre-Cleburne case, Irving Independent School District v. Tatro.\(^\text{14}\) Part III introduces what this Note argues is the correct standard of review—intermediate scrutiny—and makes the constitutional argument in support of its implementation for disability rights cases. Part IV applies intermediate scrutiny to Garrett to emphasize how its irrational consequences would change, while well-reasoned decisions, such as Tatro, would not. Finally, Part V contends that the consequences of applying intermediate scrutiny for people with disabilities would not merely be symbolic, but practical and tangible, precluding state-enforced discrimination and removing rational basis review’s significant limitations to the scope and impact of the ADA. Thus, through case analysis, examining the constitutional requirements for intermediate scrutiny, and evaluating pragmatic consequences, this Note argues in strong and enthusiastic support of intermediate scrutiny for people with disabilities.


I. RATIONAL BASIS REVIEW AND ITS APPLICATION TO DISABILITY RIGHTS CASES SINCE CLEBURNE

Section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment provides that a state shall not “deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” However, equal protection exists against a backdrop that requires most legislation to classify individuals for some purpose or another. The Court applies different levels of scrutiny when determining whether a classification violates the Fourteenth Amendment. To determine what level of scrutiny is appropriate, the Court first considers whether the affected group is a suspect class. Where prejudice against “discrete and insular minorities” undercuts the “operation of those political processes ordinarily to be relied upon to protect minorities,” a “more searching judicial inquiry” is appropriate. The Equal Protection Clause requires heightened judicial scrutiny for legislation that meet certain conditions, including laws which on their face violate a provision of the Constitution; attempt to distort the political process; or discriminate against minorities, particularly those who experience relative political powerlessness. Justice Powell would later state that while a precondition of democracy requires that majorities govern, the Court must ensure that all groups, regardless of minority status, “can engage equally in the political process.” Consequently, the Equal Protection Clause obligates the Court to review legislation affecting minority groups unable to protect themselves through the political process with greater scrutiny.

The highest level of scrutiny, “strict scrutiny,” applies to deprivations of rights and classifications grounded in race, alienage, and national ori-

15 See U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 1. In Bolling v. Sharpe, the Supreme Court held that the requirement of equal protection of the laws applies against the federal government through the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment. See 347 U.S. 497, 500 (1954). The analysis under the Constitution’s Fourteenth Amendment Equal Protection Clause and the equal protection guarantee via the Fifth Amendment is the same. See generally Kenneth Karst, The Fifth Amendment’s Guarantee of Equal Protection, 55 N.C. L. Rev. 541, 542 (1977).
17 See id.
18 See id.
19 See Lewis F. Powell, Jr., Caroleine Products Revisited, 82 Colum. L. Rev. 1087, 1088–89 (1982) (“The fundamental character of our government is democratic. Our constitution assumes that majorities should rule and that the government should be able to govern . . . But there are certain groups that cannot participate effectively in the political process and the political groups in the way it protects most of us . . . [there are] two special missions in our scheme of government: First to clear away any impediments to participation, and to ensure that all groups can engage equally in the political process; and second, to review with heightened scrutiny legislation inimical to discrete and insular minorities who are unable to protect themselves in the legislative process.”).
22 See City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Ctr., 473 U.S. 432, 440 (1985) (explaining that classifications based on race, alienage, or national origin “are so seldom relevant to the achievement of any legitimate state interest that laws grounded in such considerations are deemed to reflect prejudice and animus . . . [T]he result is a strict scrutiny analysis, and will be sustained only if they are suitably tailored to serve a compelling state interest”).
It requires such laws to be “narrowly tailored to further a compelling
government interest.”23 Strict scrutiny is often said to be strict in theory, but
fatal in fact.24 Indeed, an empirical study reveals that laws only survive strict
scrutiny approximately 30% of the time.25 The Court has not applied strict
scrutiny to legislation affecting people with disabilities, and is unlikely to do
so in the future, for both jurisprudential and practical reasons. First, from a
jurisprudential perspective, the Court would likely find that disability is rele-
vant to the legislature’s goals and decisions.27 The state has a legitimate inter-
est in providing an environment for people with disabilities to thrive, and
when the legislature makes decisions that advance that goal, those decisions
necessarily require a distinction on the basis of disability status. For exam-
ple, for the legislature to establish Social Security benefits for people with
disabilities, the law must be written to classify people with a disability as a
class that will receive support. Strict scrutiny is a high bar to surpass, even
for an advantageous benefits system,28 and such a program would very likely
fail strict scrutiny review.

By contrast, the most lenient standard of review, rational basis review,
asks if there is any conceivable justification for the law or state action. Ra-
tional basis review merely requires that a law’s classification be rationally
related to a legitimate state interest.29 Under this tremendously deferential
standard, the government enjoys a “strong presumption of validity”30 and

24 Fisher, 570 U.S. at 301–11.
25 See Peña, 515 U.S. at 268 (quoting Fulilove v. Klutznick, 448 U.S. 448, 519 (1980)).
26 See Adam Winkler, Fatal in Theory and Strict in Fact: An Empirical Analysis of Strict
27 Analogizing persons with disabilities to the elderly, a group to whom the Court declined
to give heightened scrutiny in Massachusetts Board of Retirement v. Murgia, 427 U.S. 307
(1976), Justice White explained: “[W]here individuals in the group affected by a law have
distinguishing characteristics relevant to the interests the State has the authority to implement,
the courts have been very reluctant, as they should be in our federal system and with our
respect for the separation of powers, to closely scrutinize legislative choices as to whether,
how, and to what extent those interests should be pursued.” Cleburne, 473 U.S. at 441–42. The
Court further reasoned that “[b]ecause mental retardation is a characteristic that government
may legitimately take into account in a wide range of decisions, and because both State and
Federal Governments have recently committed themselves to assisting the retarded, we will
not presume that any given legislative action, even one that disadvantages retarded individuals,
is rooted in considerations that the Constitution will not tolerate.” Id. at 446.
the Supreme Court Changes the Rules in Race Cases, 72 U. PIT. L. REV. 3, 17 (arguing that
because strict scrutiny is “strict in theory, fatal in fact,” benefits programs, like affirmative
action programs, often fail despite the benefit they provide the suspect class). For the advan-
tages of the Social Security program, see the Social Security website, which states: “The So-
cial Security and Supplemental Security Income disability programs are the largest of several
Federal programs that provide assistance to people with disabilities.” Benefits for People with
Y]. The website goes on to describe that Social Security Disability Insurance pays benefits to
the insured and certain members of one’s family. See id.
the state action “must be upheld against [an] equal protection challenge if there is any reasonably conceivable set of facts that could articulate a rational basis for the classification.”31

Where a group bears indicia of historical discrimination and characteristic immutability,32 as in the case of classifications rooted in sex or birth outside of wedlock, the Court has recognized a middle, “quasi-suspect classification,” to which it has applied intermediate scrutiny.33 Intermediate scrutiny requires that a law be “substantially related to an important governmental purpose.”34 In applying intermediate scrutiny, the court asks if the challenged law or state action furthers an important government interest and is substantially related to the achievement of that interest.35

Classifications on the basis of disability are currently subject only to rational basis review, the most lenient level of scrutiny. The enforcement of laws designed to help people with disabilities is significantly diminished under rational basis review, because almost any argument that the law is too onerous to apply will defeat a claim. Because rational basis usually sounds the death-knell for equal protection claims,36 it provides virtually no protections for people with disabilities. This is critical because the courts are an essential vehicle for advocacy and the enforcement of rights of people with disabilities (such as those rights created by the ADA).37

In addition to nullifying constitutional remedies, rational basis effectively guts the statutory protections of the ADA, transforming it into a law that requires reasonable accommodations to people with disabilities in the workplace and school, so long as that accommodation bears zero cost burden on the accommodator. Cleburne also puts substantial limitations on Congress’s ability to effectively legislate on behalf of people with disabilities more generally, because any law, like the ADA, will be less effective when enforced under a rational basis review paradigm. As Professor Michael E. Waterstone writes, “[n]ot gaining constitutional ground is tantamount to

32 See Frontiero v. Richardson, 411 U.S. 677, 685–86 (1973) (plurality opinion) (agreeing that where historic discrimination and immutability exists, intermediate scrutiny is appropriate).
35 See Craig, 429 U.S. at 197.
losing it,” so Cleburne carried long-term costs for people with disabilities hoping to advocate for their rights.\footnote{Waterstone, supra note 7, at 547.}

Under rational basis review, the ADA is an incomplete tool to comprehensively advocate for and achieve equity for people with disabilities. Effective advocacy requires more stringent constitutional tools than the flimsy system currently in place.\footnote{See Bartschi, supra note 37, at 473 (discussing rational basis review’s detrimental consequences in the fight for sexual orientation equality under the law); Waterstone, supra note 7, at 531 (“Constitutional law is at least in part about recognizing past injustices and current prejudice against groups, but it is not being used at all in this way for people with disabilities.”).} Under rational basis review, the plaintiff must overcome a strong presumption of constitutional validity. Under both intermediate and strict scrutiny, however, the government has the burden of establishing the law’s constitutionality.

Both intermediate and strict scrutiny were explicitly rejected as the appropriate standard of review for equal protection challenges involving individuals with disabilities in \textit{City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Center}. The Court is unlikely to move from a rational basis review to a strict scrutiny review,\footnote{See Yoshino, \textit{The New Equal Protection}, supra note 36, at 757 (arguing that new groups are unlikely to receive heightened constitutional protection due to the Court’s wariness to recognize new classes, noting that the last classification to receive heightened scrutiny was in 1977).} and such a move might not ultimately be beneficial to people with disabilities. However, recognizing people with disabilities as a quasi-suspect class would mitigate the irrational consequences of rational basis review by applying a stricter standard for denials of reasonable accommodations under the ADA. Further, applying intermediate scrutiny would bring judicial review in line with Congress’s intent to provide individuals with disabilities with parallel legal tools to those “afforded to persons on the basis of race, sex, national origin, and religion”\footnote{See 134 Cong. Rec. 9383 (1988) (statement of Sen. Harkin).} when the ADA was enacted.\footnote{Id. (stating that the purpose of the ADA is “to provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against persons with disabilities”; to provide a prohibition of discrimination that is “parallel in scope . . . with that afforded to persons on the basis of race, sex, national origin, and religion”; to provide clear and enforceable standards addressing discrimination; and to invoke Congress’ Fourteenth Amendment powers to regulate and address major issues of discrimination against persons with disabilities).}

In the years following \textit{Cleburne’s} decree of rational basis review for disability-rights cases, people with disabilities turned to the ADA to realize their rights, but under the very deferential rational basis standard, those efforts came up short. Justice Marshall, in \textit{Cleburne}, recognized that “[i]t is natural that evolving standards of equality come to be embodied in legislation,” and the Court should take notice “of such change as a source of guidance on evolving principles of equality.”\footnote{City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Ctr., 473 U.S. 432, 466 (1985) (Marshall, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part).} But after the passage of the ADA, when the Court should have taken notice of Congress’ recognition that...
equality means integrating people with disabilities into communities and providing meaningful access, the Court, particularly the Rehnquist Court, applied rational basis in such a way that stripped people with disabilities of their rights, rather than empowering them.

II. THE REHNQUIST COURT’S IRRATIONAL ECONOMIC RATIONALITY TEST

a. The Rehnquist Court’s Quiet Changes to Rationality Review of Disability Rights Claims

Courts have struggled to define who is entitled to a reasonable accommodation, and when a reasonable accommodation is appropriate. In the employment context, the ADA forces judges to embark on the precarious tightrope of balancing the statute’s competing requirements that workers be “disabled,” yet remain capable of performing job functions at a satisfactory level. Shortly after Cleburne, the Rehnquist Court complicated this inquiry further by quietly transforming rational basis review into an even more deferential economic rational basis review, which effectively foreclosed recourse for many people with disabilities under the ADA.

The passage of the ADA in 1990, five years after Cleburne, gave voice to Congress’s stern censure that the Court’s choice of rational basis review for individuals with disabilities incorrectly addressed the characteristics and needs of the group. For a brief moment after the ADA’s passage, this message seemed to resonate and the Act reflected a laudable achievement for people with disabilities. But shortly thereafter, disability-rights jurisprudence hit a wall with the Rehnquist Court. The Rehnquist Court relaxed the already-deferential standard of rational basis review in two ways. First, the Court added an economic gloss to rational basis review as applied to people with disabilities. Second, the Court began to demand that Congress have produced a robust legislative history for laws—like the ADA—that were passed under its 14th Amendment enforcement powers, regardless of when the law was enacted. The Rehnquist Court’s irrational application of economic rationality limited the ADA in a way that undermined its central

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44 See Austin Raynor, Economic Liberty and the Second-Order Rational Basis Test, 99 Va. L. Rev. 1065, 1066–70 (asserting that where cases implicate economic interests, rational basis standard will be easier for the defendant to meet).


46 See, e.g., Griffin v. Oceanic Contractors, Inc., 458 U.S. 564, 570 (1982) (stating that the task of Congress is to search legislative intent based on the clear and plain language of the statute); see also United States v. Am. Trucking Ass’ns, 310 U.S. 534, 542 (1940) (finding that legislative intent should be the beginning and end of the purpose of the statute).

47 “Economic rationality” describes the approach taken by the Rehnquist Court with respect to rational basis review, requiring not only rational justifications but economically rational reasons, which has been followed by the lower courts. For examples of economic
purpose of protecting the rights of people with disabilities. The Court’s continuing application of rational basis review, and the even more pro-defendant economic rational basis review, is misaligned with Congressional intent and guts the effectiveness of the ADA.

Before examining the impact of the Court’s application of rational basis review to disability rights cases, this Note will briefly review some of the key provisions at issue in those cases. The ADA is comprised of five titles. Title I of the ADA requires an employer to provide a “reasonable accommodation” to qualified employees with disabilities, except when such accommodation would cause an “undue hardship.” Title II of the ADA requires the same accommodations for public entities. Title III includes public schools, and requires them to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities unless such accommodations impact the health and safety of others.

A reasonable accommodation under either Title I or II can be: (i) a modification or adjustment that enables a qualified applicant with a disability to be considered for a position; (ii) a modification that enables a qualified individual to perform the “essential functions” of a job; or (iii) a modification that enables an employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment as similarly situated employees. An accommodation is “reasonable” if it is “feasible” or plausible. As discussed below, since the Rehnquist Court first introduced an economic gloss to rationality review, these standards have been determined by comparing the costs of an accommodation with its benefits. Under the ADA, an otherwise reasonable accommodation is not required if it poses an “undue hardship,” which the Court has defined in terms of cost and difficulty, virtually enshrining an economic rational basis review at the Supreme Court level, see, e.g., U.S. Airways, Inc. v. Barnett, 535 U.S. 391, 395 (2002) (finding that it would be an undue hardship for an airline company to change their seniority system to provide a reasonable accommodation under the ADA because changing the policy that had been in place for “decades” would cost money to the company); Philbrook, 479 U.S. at 67 (citing Hardison, 432 U.S. at 74 n.9) (finding that an accommodation causes “undue hardship” when the accommodation results in “more than a de minimis cost” to the employer”). For an application of economic rational basis review at the Court of Appeals level, see, e.g., Monette v. Elec. Data Sys. Corp., 90 F.3d 1173, 1184 n.10 (6th Cir. 1996); Vande Zande v. Wis. Dep’t of Admin., 44 F.3d 538, 543 (7th Cir. 1995). This economic analysis applied by the Rehnquist Court has no foundation in the statute, regulations, or legislative history of the ADA. See 42 U.S.C. § 12111 (10) (2016) (defining “undue hardship” as “an action requiring significant difficulty or expense” in light of the factors in 10(B) (emphasis added)); 29 C.F.R. § 1630.2(o). (p) (2017) (same).
economic rationality review into the assessment of what constitutes a reasonable accommodation under the statute.

Traditional rational basis review was already inadequate to implement the ADA, but economic rational basis review led to results that were truly irrational. Under a traditional rational basis review, a classification need only be rationally related to a legitimate state interest. The Rehnquist Court relaxed the already-deferential standard, first, by adding an economic gloss to rational basis review as applied to people with disabilities, and second, by demanding that Congress have produced a robust legislative history for laws—like the ADA—that were passed under its 14th Amendment enforcement powers. With these changes, the Rehnquist Court’s version of rational basis review produced truly irrational decisions with respect to the ADA.

i. The Addition of an Economic Gloss to Rationality Review

The ADA generally requires employers, public entities, and public schools to provide a “reasonable accommodation” to qualified individuals with disabilities, except when such accommodation would cause an “undue hardship.” The Rehnquist Court interpreted undue hardship not as “significant expense,” as defined in the statute, but as almost any expense, which barred people with disabilities from integration in society and relief from historic discrimination under the ADA. Under this economic rational basis review, almost any economic justification for refusing an accommodation would be upheld.

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In determining the “reasonableness” of a reasonable accommodation under the ADA, the Rehnquist Court prioritized concerns of costs to and economic hardship on the accommodating party (like the workplace or school) over the need for the accommodation, or what the individual with an accommodation could contribute to the workplace. This resulted in a strong pro-employer orientation by the Court. Where an accommodation was not “easily accomplishable,” meaning “without much difficulty or expense,” the Rehnquist Court found that it was not required by the ADA.

_Chevron U.S.A., Inc. v. Echazabal_ exemplifies the Court’s shift to economic rational basis review. Mario Echazabal worked as a contractor for Chevron and twice applied to the company for employment. This application required physical examinations, which revealed some abnormalities in his liver. When Mr. Echazabal’s request for the reasonable accommodation of being reassigned to another area of the factory was denied, Mr. Echazabal filed suit, alleging that Chevron had violated the ADA by refusing to hire him on account of his disability, or at the very least, by not allowing him to continue working as a contractor at Chevron due to his medical examinations. The Supreme Court found that the ADA required no accommodation by Chevron after considering the economic arguments—such as: reduced time lost to sickness, excessive turnover from medical retirement or death, and litigation costs under tort law. According to the Rehnquist Court, economic considerations provided valid rationales for denying Mr. Echazabal employment or an accommodation because they showed that the accommodation was not reasonable. In fact, the Court’s analysis was really an application of economic rational basis review, rather than traditional rational basis review. As _Echazabal_ makes clear, the Rehnquist Court’s shift to one of economic rationality severely hindered the protections instituted by the ADA.

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63 See generally, Ruth Colker & James J. Brudney, _Dissing Congress_, 100 Mich. L. Rev. 80, 85–86 (2001) (explaining that the Rehnquist Court focused on the burden brought by the individual with a disability, not their potential contribution).

64 See Waterstone, _supra_ note 7, at 531.

65 See 28 C.F.R. § 36.304 (2017); see also Bd. of Trs. of the Univ. of Ala. v. Garrett, 531 U.S. 356, 372–74 (2001); Albertson’s, Inc. v. Kirkingburg, 527 U.S. 555, 577 (1999) (unanimously reversing a Ninth Circuit decision that protected a commercial truck driver who was fired after failing basic vision standards required by federal regulation because accommodation was too expensive, even though the vision standard was not a requirement for working for the trucking company and the individual could have performed a number of other tasks); Bragdon v. Abbott, 524 U.S. 624, 638–62 (1998) (Rehnquist, C.J., dissenting) (exemplifying Justice Rehnquist’s economic rationality standard by defining “major” under the statute to mean “greater in quantity, number or extent” and focusing on cost).


67 Id. at 76.

68 Id. at 73.

69 Id.

70 Id. at 76–77.

71 See id. at 84.

72 Id.
ii. The Addition of a Legislative History Requirement

The Rehnquist Court required not only that an accommodation under the ADA bear no economic burden to the employer. It also refused to enforce statutes without written proof of a robust legislative history whenever Congress sought to employ its 14th Amendment enforcement powers. Only with this “crystal ball” could the legislature’s action survive the Rehnquist Court’s scrutiny under rationality review, a hurdle which is often fatal, because it requires Congress to have provided a comprehensive rationale for passing remedial legislation. The irrationality of such an inquiry becomes especially pronounced when one considers that, at least initially, Congress could not have anticipated such a review by the Courts, and thus, would not necessarily have stated its intentions in such an explicit way when passing a law. An example of this situation can be found in *Board of Trustees of the University of Alabama v. Garrett*, discussed at length in the next section, where the Court required a robust legislative history of the ADA before it would attempt to discern Congress’ intent. This, of course, could not have been foreseen by Congress as they were enacting the statute in 1990, before the Rehnquist Court adopted its microscopic approach to examining legislative purpose and intent.

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73 See Colker & Brudney, supra note 63, at 85 (describing the Rehnquist Court’s “crystal ball” approach that “effectively penalizes the enacting Congress for failing to create a detailed legislative record, even though such a record requirement could not reasonably have been anticipated at the moment of legislative deliberation and enactment”).

74 Id.

75 United States v. Morrison, 529 U.S. 598, 612 (2000) (finding that Congress did not create a sufficient legislative history to abrogate state sovereign immunity under Section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment).

76 This approach also departs from the understanding that Congress and the Court are coequal branches of government because it requires Congress to justify its standard and “micromanage[s]” the work of Congress. See Colker & Brudney, supra note 63, at 85.


78 See infra Part II(B).

79 Garrett, 531 U.S. at 368 (stating that “[t]he legislative record of the ADA, however, simply fails to show that Congress did in fact identify a pattern of irrational state discrimination in employment against the disabled”).

80 See id.

81 The ADA was enacted in 1990, five years before the Supreme Court initiated the series of decisions described in Part I that substantially re-configured its relations with Congress and defined what rights created by Congress applied to the states. *See* Fla. Prepaid Postsecondary Educ. Expense Bd. v. Coll. Sav. Bank, 527 U.S. 627, 630 (1990). But see Garrett, 531 U.S. at 389–91 appx. A, B (Breyer, J., dissenting) (listing thirteen congressional hearings on the ADA during 101st Congress, and prior federal statutes enacted between 1948 and 1988 addressing discrimination against individuals with disabilities); *see also* Colker & Brudney, supra note 63, at 118–19 (“At the time it enacted the ADA, Congress had little reason to foresee any constitutional requirement for detailed record building . . . But even if it had anticipated a need for more extensive evidentiary support, Congress in 1990 could not possibly have foreseen that its historic methods of educating itself outside the formalities of the hearing room, or its reliance on evidence of discrimination engaged in by closely analogous government actors at the local level, would be excluded from consideration when the record was being reviewed.”).
By inappropriately scrutinizing the actions of a co-equal branch of government, the Rehnquist Court contravened the rationale that led Justice White to adopt rational basis review in Cleburne in the first place: deference to Congress. In his majority opinion, Justice White recognized that there could be distinguishing characteristics between individuals upon which the legislature can rightfully make classifications like disability.\(^{82}\) However, he wrote, “the courts have been very reluctant as they should be in our federal system and with our respect for the separation of powers to closely scrutinize legislative choices as to whether, how, and to what extent those interests should be pursued” because the legislature is better equipped to make such decisions.\(^{83}\) While Chief Justice Rehnquist’s opinion in Garrett relies on Cleburne to apply rational basis review, it simultaneously disregards the Cleburne rationale for why rational basis was appropriate—separation of powers. Even if one accepts Cleburne’s reasoning as correct, as the Rehnquist Court purported to do, one cannot follow its command to apply rational basis review while simultaneously “closely scrutiniz[ing]” the actions of the legislature.\(^{84}\) But this is exactly what the Rehnquist Court did in Garrett, asking if there was any rational justification for the law, and simultaneously scrutinizing the legislature’s proposed justifications and finding that the legislative history provided an incomplete rationale.\(^{85}\)

\(\textbf{b. The Impact of the Rehnquist Court’s Changes to Rationality Review: University of Alabama v. Garrett}\)

\(\textit{i. Garrett’s irrational application of rational basis review}\)

\(\textit{University of Alabama v. Garrett}\) was a suit brought by plaintiffs Milton Ash and Patricia Garrett, who were both disabled employees of the University of Alabama.\(^{86}\) Mr. Ash was a security guard with a lifelong history of asthma and Ms. Garrett was an emergency room nurse diagnosed with breast cancer that required aggressive treatment.\(^{87}\) The University refused to enforce its previously adopted “no smoking” policy and required Mr. Ash to drive cars that leaked carbon monoxide fumes into the passenger department.\(^{88}\) And Ms. Garrett, upon returning to her job after breast cancer treatment, was transferred from her job as a supervising nurse to a lower paying position with an order that she could either accept the new role or be


\(^{83}\) \textit{Id.} at 441–42.

\(^{84}\) See \textit{id.}

\(^{85}\) \textit{Garrett}, 531 U.S. at 368.

\(^{86}\) See \textit{id.} at 362.

\(^{87}\) \textit{Id.}

Both filed suit under Title I of the ADA, claiming that the University had discriminated against them on the basis of their disabilities.

The Court held that the plaintiffs’ claims were barred by state sovereign immunity. The Court considered whether Congress could permissibly abrogate state sovereign immunity under Section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment, as it attempted to do under the ADA. This would require that the abrogation be congruent and proportional to a pattern of discrimination by the state. Justice Rehnquist concluded that Congress had not abrogated state sovereign immunity through the ADA, so the Court could not reach the merits of Ms. Garrett and Mr. Ash’s claims.

Putting aside whether this holding was appropriate or whether Congress effectively abrogated its influence with the passage of the ADA, the case provides a glimpse into the Court’s consideration of disability under an economic rationality standard. The Court speculated in dictum that “it would be entirely rational (and therefore constitutional) for a state employer to conserve scarce financial resources by hiring employees able to use existing facilities,” so it would be rational, according to the Court, to deny plaintiffs their accommodations if considerations of cost could justify hiring someone else. If this case were considered under intermediate scrutiny, as this Note suggests it should have been, the Court would have been forced to examine the content of the accommodations requested by plaintiffs and whether they were required under federal law relative to the burden they placed on the state. In applying rational basis review, the Court departs both in theory and in practice from the spirit of the ADA by looking not to the potential contribution of the individual with a disability, but to the degree of economic hardship required of the employer.

One could imagine non-intrusive and even very reasonable accommodations that the University could have made for Ms. Garrett and Mr. Ash. Ms. Garrett merely asked to return to her previous position, the functions of which she was fully capable of performing, and Mr. Ash merely asked for the University to enforce its previously adopted no-smoking policy. The accommodations requested by the Plaintiffs would require some effort on the part of the state, admittedly, but that effort would be very minimal and pales in comparison to the potential contribution those individuals might have made with the accommodations.

Chief Justice Rehnquist also referenced his “crystal ball approach” for rational basis review and found an incomplete legislative history to support
the plaintiffs’ argument that people with disabilities had experienced discrimination from the state (which would have been required to demonstrate a pattern of discrimination necessary for Congress to abrogate state sovereign immunity95). Asking that Congress do the impossible and travel back in time eleven years to create a robust legislative history supporting the ADA when none was required at its passage, Chief Justice Rehnquist noted that the ADA lacked the legislative history required for a law that affords protection for a class of individuals.96 Justice Breyer, in dissent, found a history of discrimination documented in the legislative findings of Congress in passing the ADA, stating that Congress “reasonably could have concluded that the remedy [Title II of the ADA] [ ] constitutes an ‘appropriate’ way to enforce this basic equal protection requirement.”97 Justice Breyer urged the Court not to rest solely on the legislative findings of Congress in passing the ADA, but also to reference the more than 300 examples of discrimination by state governments against individuals with disabilities in the legislative record.98

In dissent, Justice Breyer also noted that, as the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits states from denying their citizens equal protection under the law, the argument that Alabama was entitled to deny a reasonable accommodation on the grounds of federalism made no sense.99 The 14th Amendment was intentionally “designed as an expansion of federal power and an intrusion on state sovereignty,”100 so the argument that Congress imposed on the states to protect people with disabilities from employment discrimination was not unconstitutional.

Garrett ushered in the erosion of equal protection for people with disabilities,101 epitomizing the Rehnquist Court’s signature interpretation of the ADA—applying economic rational basis or looking to notions of federalism to avoid providing redressability for rights created by Congress. Under this regime, any legislative victories won by people with disabilities are for naught. In an effort to advance notions of federalism and economic rationality, the Court branded the substance of equal protection rights as subservient to the federalist structure between the states and the federal government

95 See Boerne, 521 U.S. at 517–19 (holding that Congress may abrogate state sovereign immunity under the 14th Amendment if the abrogation is congruent and proportional to a pattern of constitutional violations by the state); see also Fitzpatrick, 427 U.S. 445.
96 Garrett, 531 U.S. at 368 (stating that “[t]he legislative record of the ADA, however, simply fails to show that Congress did in fact identify a pattern of irrational state discrimination in employment against the disabled”).
97 Id. at 377 (Breyer, J., dissenting).
98 Id. at 379.
99 Id. at 379.
100 Id. at 377.
101 Id. at 388 (Breyer, J., dissenting).
102 See, e.g., Roger C. Hartley, Enforcing Federal Civil Rights Against Public Entities After Garrett, 28 J.C. & U.L. 41, 44 (2001) (arguing that Garrett and cases of similar ilk “raised the bar making it more problematic than ever that Congress will be able to deploy Section 5” for civil rights, and thus, made it more difficult for people with disabilities to seek equal protection under the law through legislation or litigation).
under the Eleventh Amendment. 102 Garrett demonstrates in dictum the irrational outcomes of rational basis review under the ADA for people with disabilities, revealing absurd consequences—not effectuating the ADA for reasons of federalism—which are far from the intent of Congress in passing the statute. 103

ii. Tatro’s Well-Reasoned Outcome

Prior to both the Court’s decision in Cleburne—which established rational basis as the presumptive constitutional test for people with disabilities—and Congress’ subsequent passage of the ADA, the Court considered several disability rights cases. A number of these cases, including Irving Independent School District v. Tatro 104 in 1984, are consistent with widely held understandings of equal protection and the positive externalities associated with integrating people with disabilities into communities and society writ large. As this section will show, Tatro’s well-reasoned outcome was only possible before Cleburne’s requirement of rational basis review for people with disabilities and the Rehnquist Court’s introduction of economic rational basis review.

Tatro was brought by plaintiff Amber Tatro, an eight year-old girl who was born with spina bifida. Among other things, her disability required catheterization several times a day to prevent kidney damage. 105 The catheterization procedure was a “simple one that may be performed in a few minutes by a layperson with less than an hour’s training.” 106 Amber’s parents, babysitter, and teenage brother were all qualified to change her catheter and soon Amber would have been able to perform the catheterization procedure herself. 107 While Amber’s school provided a number of special services, it refused to provide catheterization for Amber. Without it, Amber was not able to attend school at all. 108 Amber’s parents brought the action for an injunction that would have required the public school district to provide the catheterization so Amber could attend school. Because Texas received federal funding under the Education of the Handicapped Act, the state was required to pro-

102 See Colker & Brudney, supra note 63, at 83 (arguing that the Rehnquist Court acted repeatedly to invalidate federal legislation to use notions of federalism to disempower Congress and its legislation).
103 The ADA explicitly called people with disabilities a discrete and insular minority, referencing the group’s “history of purposeful unequal treatment” and their position “relegated to a position of political powerlessness in our society based on those characteristics.” 42 U.S.C. § 12101(a)(7) (1990) (amended and struck in 2008).
105 See id. at 885.
106 Id.
107 Id. at 885 (Clean intermittent catheterization (“CIC”) “is a simple [procedure] that may be performed in a few minutes by a layperson with less than an hour’s training. Amber’s parents, babysitter, and teenage brother are all qualified to administer CIC, and Amber soon will be able to perform this procedure herself.”).
108 Id.
vide Amber with a “free appropriate public education.”\textsuperscript{109} The Supreme Court, writing the year before \textit{Cleburne}, unanimously held that providing clean, intermittent catheterization qualified as a “related service,” and not a “medical service” under the applicable pre-ADA disability statute.\textsuperscript{110} Thus, the school was required to make the accommodation and Amber would be able to attend school because catheterization was a reasonable accommodation. In its explanation, the Court reasoned that a physician need not provide that catheterization; a teacher or assistant, and soon Amber herself, could perform the procedure. Therefore, the effort of providing the accommodation for Amber was not sufficiently burdensome on the school such that it could legally be withheld.\textsuperscript{111} Further, because “Congress sought primarily to make public education available to handicapped children . . . [and] to make such access meaningful,”\textsuperscript{112} and because catheterizations were necessary for Amber to attend school, the Court found that they should be provided to her.\textsuperscript{113}

At least one scholar has argued that \textit{Tatro} reflects a “sound, well-reasoned” decision because it balances equities in a way that aligns with our normative understandings about integration and access to services for people with disabilities.\textsuperscript{114} For these reasons, this Note will refer to \textit{Tatro} as “well-reasoned” and “correctly”\textsuperscript{115} decided, acknowledging that the “correctness” of any decision is subject to disagreement. If public education is to be available to children with disabilities, and if Congress intended to make such access meaningful, then it follows that a simple and medically necessary catheterization procedure during the day should be available to children like Amber Tatro. Refusing to allow that accommodation would bar her com-

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}[\textsuperscript{109}]
\item See id. at 886; see also 20 U.S.C. §§ 1412(1), 1414(a)(1)(C)(ii) (2016).
\item \textit{Tatro}, 468 U.S. at 889–90. In addition, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (“EAHCA”) mandate requires that states and subsidiary educational actors, to qualify for federal assistance, must provide “special education” and “related services.” 20 U.S.C. § 1401(18) (2016) (defining “free appropriate public education” as “special education and related services which (A) have been provided at public expense under public supervision and direction, and without charge, (B) meet the standards of the State educational agency, (C) include an appropriate preschool, elementary, or secondary education in the State involved, and (D) are provided in conformity with the individualized education program required under section 1414(a)(5) of this title”).
\item \textit{Tatro}, 468 U.S. at 893.
\item Bd. Of Educ. of the Hendrick Hudson Cent. Sch. Dist. v. Rowley, 458 U.S. 176, 192–214 (1982); see also \textit{Tatro}, 468 U.S. at 883. Children with serious medical needs are still entitled to an education. For example, the EAHCA specifically includes instruction in hospitals and at home within the definition of “special education.” See 20 U.S.C. § 1401(16).
\item \textit{Tatro}, 468 U.S. at 883 (finding that an accommodation of catheterization was a reasonable accommodation).
\item See Wegner, supra note 13, at 212 (“The Court’s decision in \textit{Tatro} is a sound, well-reasoned one. The case’s outcome reflected the balance of equities involved.”); see generally Mitchell L. Yell et al., \textit{The U.S. Supreme Court and Special Education: 2005 to 2007}, 41 \textit{TEACHING EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN} 68, 68 (2009) (discussing the norms of public education and that inclusion of students with disabilities aligns to those normative values).
\item See Wegner, supra note 13, at 212–13 (supporting the proposition that \textit{Tatro} is “correctly” decided).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
pletely from a public education. *Brown v. Board of Education* proclaimed that public education must be made available on equal terms.116 And in *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Pennsylvania*,117 the Court found that Pennsylvania was required to educate all children, including children with disabilities.118 The Court has also recognized that Congress sought to make “public education available to handicapped children” and “to make such access meaningful.”119 Denial of a public school education on the basis of a medical condition disrupts our understanding of what is “fair,” a normative structure rooted deeply in the idea of school integration and not punishing individuals for circumstances outside their control.120 Therefore, *Tatro*’s conclusion that catheterization was a reasonable accommodation was well-reasoned and correctly decided.

However, under traditional rational basis review, as subsequently required by *Cleburne*, *Tatro* would likely result in a different and quite irrational outcome. The School District in *Tatro* argued that a favorable verdict would result in parental demands for every conceivable medical service.121 In addition, it argued that introduction of disabilities into the school environment “creates numerous new possibilities for injury and liability,”122 which would expose the School District to new and perhaps significant costs. The School District argued that Amber should be homeschooled because of the burden of having to provide the catheterization service.

By applying the Rehnquist Court’s version of economic rational basis review to *Tatro*, the absurdity of economic rational basis review for people with disabilities becomes even more pronounced. The Court recommended in the actual *Tatro* opinion that the District could increase their liability insurance coverage, but this still results in additional costs for the school in the form of increased insurance premiums. An economic rational basis review

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118 Id. at 315.
120 See Kenneth Pierce, *Thomas Reid on Character and Freedom*, 29 Hist. Phil. Q. 159, 173 (2012) (observing that one cannot be blamed or punished for something outside of one’s control so long as it was an unavoidable necessity).
121 Irving Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Tatro, 468 U.S. 883, 893 (1984); see also *Tatro v. Texas*, 481 F.Supp. 1227, 1227 (N.D. Tex. 1979). The district court found that the related services that the applicable education act required were for (1) transportation and (2) related services that assist the child to benefit from education. The court found that the related services category might, if read literally, require schools to furnish “every necessary life support system.” Therefore, the court adopted a narrower view that “to be related in the statutory sense the service requirement must arise from the effort to educate.” *Tatro*, 481 F.Supp. at 1227.
122 *Tatro*, 468 U.S. at 893.
applied to the facts of *Tatro* would balance these projected (and speculative) costs against the benefits of sending Amber Tatro to school with catheterization, and these costs would almost certainly tip the balance in favor of the School District. Were the case to be brought today, the Court, citing rational basis review (but likely applying the economic gloss introduced by the Rehnquist Court), could conclude that a *denial* of catheterization was rationally related to both of the school district’s objections: limiting the onslaught of student accommodation requests and minimizing the school’s liability exposure. Thus, under rational basis review, and especially under Chief Justice Rehnquist’s economic rationality standard, Amber Tatro would very likely be denied an accommodation under the ADA. Even though *Tatro* reflects our normative understandings about the “correct” outcome for individuals with disabilities, *Cleburne* straps the Court into the regime of unreasonable, irrational, and ineffective constitutional tools for achieving that outcome.

### III. The Case for Intermediate Scrutiny

In the years following *Cleburne*, efforts to enforce legislative tools like the ADA came up woefully short against the deferential rational basis standard and its focus on economic rationality. Given the absurd consequences of rational basis review, and the even greater incongruity flowing from the Rehnquist Court’s economic rational basis review, a natural question became: what level of scrutiny would be more appropriate for the Court to apply in disability cases?

Because the level of scrutiny is often determinative of the outcome, one might envision a carefully concocted recipe for designating a quasi-suspect class. But in reality, the doctrine is a bit chaotic. Even where the Court has agreed on the correct characteristics of a suspect class, it has not settled on a solid understanding of the required elements and the appropriate weight each element should receive. However, a review of the jurisprudence over time

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123 See Cass Sunstein, *What did Lawrence Hold? Of Autonomy, Desuetude, Sexuality, and Marriage*, 55 *SUP. CT. REV.* 27, 34 (2003) (“To say the least, the Court has not laid down a clear test for deciding when [strict] scrutiny will be applied” in equal protection cases.”); see also Darren Lenard Hutchinson, “*Not without Political Power*: Gays and Lesbians, *Equal Protection*, 65 *ALA. L. REV.* 975, 978 (2014) (“The suspect class doctrine suffers from several weaknesses. It is extraordinarily under theorized, inconsistently applied, and it operates primarily as a gatekeeper that limits the recognition of new suspect classes rather than extending judicial solicitude to additional vulnerable groups.”).

124 See Thomas Simon, *Suspect Class Democracy: A Social Theory*, 45 *U. MIAMI L. REV.* 107, 141 (1990) (“[T]he Court uses a mixture of criteria to determine suspectness, creating an analytical muddle, and the boundary line between suspect classes and non-suspect classes is drawn in a haphazard way.”); Marcy Strauss, *Reevaluating Suspect Classifications*, 35 *SEATTLE U. L. REV.* 135, 138 (2011) (“Since the outcome of an equal protection case is largely determined by whether the group is designated as suspect, quasi-suspect, or non-suspect class, one may assume that the test for distinguishing between the three types of classes has been carefully crafted and precisely defined. But despite the decades of case law on this specific issue, nothing could be further from the truth. The Supreme Court has not provided a coherent explanation for precisely what factors trigger heightened scrutiny.”).
indicates that the criteria for suspect classification may include: (a) discrete and insular minority status,125 (b) historic discrimination,126 (c) immutability of the trait,127 and (d) relevance of the trait.128 In practice, the Supreme Court has never required all of these factors for a class to be considered suspect.129 Thomas Simon explains that these factors are part of the “discovery process” in determining whether a class of people warrants suspect class status.130 However, it could also be argued that the Court first decides on the level of scrutiny before using these factors retroactively to justify its conclusion.131

The Courts should recognize the inconsistency between rational basis review and the spirit of the ADA and amend the standard of constitutional review for legislation affecting people with disabilities to intermediate scrutiny. While disability lacks many of the characteristics required for suspect classification, people with disabilities are a discrete and insular minority and have experienced a history of pervasive and egregious discrimination, and they merit quasi-suspect classification status on those bases. Recognizing people with disabilities as a quasi-suspect class would mitigate the irrational consequences of rational basis review and would better bring Congress’s intent in enacting the ADA—to provide individuals with disabilities parallel legal tools to “those afforded to persons on the basis of race, sex, national origin, and religion”132—to fruition.133

125 See United States v. Carolene Prod. Co., 304 U.S. 144, 152 n.4 (1938); see also San Antonio Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 1, 28 (1973) (discussing the idea that “extraordinary protection from the majoritarian political process” serves as indicia of suspect classification).

126 See Rodriguez, 411 U.S. at 28 (finding historic discrimination as a prong to determine suspect class status).

127 See Parham v. Hughes, 441 U.S. 347, 351 (1979) (considering the importance to suspect classification of “certain . . . immutable human attributes”); see also Frontiero v. Richardson, 411 U.S. 677, 686 (1973) (observing that race, sex, and national origin are immutable characteristics).

128 See Dean v. District of Columbia, 653 A.2d 307, 346 (D.C. 1995) (finding that immutability and relevance of a trait reflect a concern for stigma, and that the other factors relate more to the Carolene Products democratic process concern); see also Strauss, supra note 124, at 165–68.

129 See Plyler v. Doe, 457 U.S. 202, 216 n.14 (1982). For the proposition that the Supreme Court suggests that meeting any of the factors for suspect classification status is sufficient, see Strauss, supra note 124, at 139–40 n.23 (“A suspect class entitled to strict scrutiny is one ‘saddled with such disabilities, or subjected to a history of purposeful unequal treatment, or relegated to such a position of political powerlessness as to command extraordinary protection from the majoritarian political process.’” (quoting San Antonio Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 1, 28 (1973) (emphasis added)).

130 See Simon, supra note 124, at 141; see also Suzanna Sherry, Selective Judicial Activism in the Equal Protection Context: Democracy, Distrust, and Deconstruction, 73 Geo. L.J. 89, 90 (1984) (arguing that the Court never sufficiently explained the factors and the need for stronger government interest and tighter fit).

131 Simon, supra note 124, at 141.


133 Id. (stating that the purpose of the ADA is “to provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against persons with disabilities”; to provide a prohibition of discrimination that is “parallel in scope . . . with that afforded to
**The case for intermediate scrutiny for people with disabilities begins with a recognition that the Court’s reasoning in *Cleburne* was deeply flawed. First, the Court glossed over its critical assumption that people with disabilities were such a “large and amorphous” group that intermediate scrutiny would not be appropriate, without reconciling this assumption with the fact that other (quasi-) suspect classifications, like women and racial groups, are not monolithic. If a foundational justification for denial of intermediate scrutiny for people with disabilities is that people with disabilities are not “cut from the same pattern,” the Court does not explain why this is different than any other group that has suspect classification status. Of course, a person with HIV does not share identical qualities with a person in a wheelchair, but this is not unlike women, with its countless subgroups, or immigrants, documented or undocumented, that have a diversity of needs and require different legislative solutions to address those needs. The LGBTQ community, for another example, has felt burdens imposed on the group as a whole by legislation and society, even though those burdens fall differently on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals. All groups have internal diversity that may influence how legislation addresses their needs. Oddly, despite saying that people with disabilities are not all “cut from the same pattern,” the Court also states a commonality shared by people with disabilities: they all “have a reduced ability to cope with and function in the everyday world.” The Court seems to both proclaim the diversity of people with disabilities and state that the group can be defined as a whole in the same breath. In doing so, the Court reveals a major vulnerability in its argument. In fact, the diversity among people with disabilities may be a strong rationale in favor of intermediate scrutiny. Intermediate scrutiny requires the court to look more closely at the state action, and as a consequence, will put a microscope to whether a given law actually addresses people with disabilities as a larger group or subgroup, whether it in fact discriminates against the group in an impermissible way or treats the entire group as monolithic.

Second, *Cleburne* blatantly ignores a history of gross mistreatment of people with disabilities, ranging from discrimination and segregation to eugenics. The Court itself has even perpetrated this historic mistreatment: Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes made the infamous statement, “three generations of imbeciles are enough,” in finding that a statute that required forced sterilization on the basis of race, sex, national origin, and religion”; to provide clear and enforceable standards addressing discrimination; and to invoke Congress’ Fourteenth Amendment powers to regulate and address major issues of discrimination against persons with disabilities.

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136 See *Cleburne*, 473 U.S. at 442.
137 See *id.*
sterilization for people with intellectual disabilities did not violate the Constitution.138 The amicus brief written by the American Association on Mental Deficiency in Cleburne noted that people with disabilities were “erroneously believed to be a ‘menace’ to society and the principal source of immorality, prostitution, and crime,” stereotypes which flourished due to the segregation of people with disabilities from society.139

A further flaw in Cleburne comes from the fact that the majority opinion overlooks the political powerlessness of people with disabilities. Thirty states retain laws on the books that deny the right to vote for people with intellectual disabilities.140 For much of history, the impact of gross mistreatment on people with disabilities was exacerbated by the political process, which subordinated people with disabilities to a role where they were unable to effectively change discriminatory laws and policies that impacted them, and were stifled by uneducated stereotypes of their abilities as “imbeciles.” People with disabilities reflect the very essence of political powerlessness.141

Additionally, Cleburne’s dictum expressed a damaging constitutional discrimination towards people with disabilities. The majority writes that people with disabilities are “different, immutably so.”142 The majority opinion has been criticized for sorting people into normal and abnormal as binary characterizations.143 This action by the Court creates the very purposeful mistreatment and discrimination that the Court is tasked with policing through its Equal Protection jurisprudence, and lends further credibility to


139 Brief of Am. Ass’n on Mental Deficiency et al. as Amici Curiae in Support of Respondents at 2, City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Ctr., Inc., 473 U.S. 432 (1985) (No. 84-468), 1985 WL 669784; see also Cleburne, 473 U.S. at 441 (quoting Mass. Bd. of Ret. v. Murgia, 427 U.S. 307, 313 (1976) (“While the treatment of the aged in this Nation has not been wholly free of discrimination, such persons . . . have not experienced a ‘history of purposeful unequal treatment’ or been subjected to stereotyped characteristics not truly indicative of their abilities.”).

140 See e.g., ALA. CONST. art. 8, § 177(b); ALASKA CONST. art. 5, § 2; ARIZ. CONST. art. 7, § 2(C); ARK. CONST. amend. 51, § 11(a)(6); CAL. CONST. art. 2, § 4; DEL. CONST. art. 5, § 2; FLA. CONST. art. 6 § 4(a); GA. CONST. art. 2, § 1, ¶ III(b); IOWA CONST. art. 2, § 5; KY. CONST. § 145(3); LA. CONST., art. 1, § 10(A); MD. CONST. art. 1, § 4; MICH. CONST. art. 2, § 2; MINN. CONST. art. 7, § 1; MISS. CONST. art. 12, § 241; MONT. CONST. art 4, § 2; NEV. CONST. art. 2, § 1; N.M. CONST. art. 7, § 1; OHIO CONST. art. 5, § 6; R.I. CONST. art. 2, § 1; TEX. CONST. art. 6, § 1(2); VT. CONST. ch. II, § 42; WA. CONST. art. 6, § 3; W. VA. CONST. art. 4, § 1; WIS. CONST. art. 3, § 2(4)(b); WYO. CONST. art. 6 § 6; Neb. Rev. Stat. § 32-313(1) (2016); N.J. STAT. ANN. § 19:4-1(1) (West 2010); S.C. CODE ANN. § 7-5-120(B)(1) (2016); VA. CODE ANN. § 24.2-101 (2016).

141 This has been recognized by Congress. See 42 U.S.C. § 12101(a) (2016) (acknowledging that people with disabilities have been “relegated to a position of political characteristics not truly indicative of their abilities”); see also James Charlton, Nothing About Us Without Us: Disability, Oppression and Empowerment (1998) (chronicling the movement known as “Nothing About Us Without Us,” which was unusual because it reflected a mobilization of people with disabilities and highlighted the many ways in which the group had been politically subjugated by laws and society).

142 See Cleburne, 473 U.S. at 461–63.

143 See Cleburne, 473 U.S. at 461–63.
the argument that people with disabilities have suffered historic mistreatment.

Finally, Cleburne eschews stereotypes, while relying on stereotypes of people with disabilities to formulate its opinion. As Professor Michael E. Waterstone frames it, the Cleburne Court acknowledged that statutes may permissibly distribute benefits and burdens among different people. In doing so, the Court acknowledged as impermissible, for example, occasions where the distribution is made based on “outmoded notions of the relative capabilities of men and women.” Yet, despite the Court’s admonishment of Texas’s zoning ordinance for its stereotypical assumptions about people with disabilities, it announced rational basis review for people with disabilities going forward. Rational basis review allows impermissible stereotypes to flourish in spite of judicial review purportedly attempting to police these assumptions. The stereotypes looked at by the Court included fears that people with disabilities were uneducable and dangerous, and that non-disabled children needed to be protected from them. The opinion in Cleburne is rife with stereotypes, such as saying those with disabilities “have a reduced ability to cope with and function in the everyday world,” and was thus decided using the very reasoning it admonished. In sum, Cleburne’s announcement of rational basis review should be disregarded first and foremost because its internal reasoning is deeply flawed.

b. People With Disabilities Meet the Criteria for Suspect Classification

i. People with Disabilities are a “Discrete and Insular Minority”

The Court has consistently required that, to be categorized as a suspect class, a group must be a discrete and insular minority, and has found a suspect class where the group was a discrete and insular minority but lacked all other suspect classification factors. Heightened protection for the politically powerless has strong textual foundations. Among the animating goals behind the Constitution, expressed through the Bill of Rights, was the pro-
tection of property owners and religious minorities against oppressive “factions.”

Though many of the explicit constitutional protections for minority groups are structural, including a separation of powers that would, in Hamilton’s conception, ward off “unjust and partial laws,” it follows that those with demonstrated political powerlessness should be entitled to non-structural, judicial protections. Congress has recognized the political powerlessness of people with disabilities and invoked protections for them through its Fourteenth Amendment enforcement powers. So, too, should the Court by announcing intermediate scrutiny as the standard of review for people with disabilities.

Congress recognized the discrete and insular minority status of individuals with disabilities in passing the ADA. The ADA explicitly refers to people with disabilities as a discrete and insular minority, referencing the group’s “history of purposeful unequal treatment” and their relegation “to a position of political powerlessness in our society based on [those] characteristics.” Department of Labor statistics demonstrate that roughly two-thirds of working-age people with disabilities remain out of work (compared to roughly a quarter of working-age people without disabilities). Although the Court has determined in previous Fourteenth Amendment jurisprudence that Congress does not have the authority to declare what constitutional rights and violations exist as a pretense to enforcing those rights through law, Congress is entitled to broad latitude to enforce the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court has given Congress significant authority in this regard, requiring that there be “congruence and proportionality between the injury to be prevented . . . and the means adopted to that end.”

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151 See Powell, supra note 19, at 1089–90 (“Where once the Court had championed rights of property, now—according to some—it should view its special function as the identification and protection of ‘discrete and insular minorities.’”).

152 See William N. Eskridge, Jr., A Pluralist Theory of the Equal Protection Clause, 11 U. PA. J. CONST. L. 1239, 1244 (2009) (stating: “[i]n James Madison’s terms, factions, which are temporary alliances of various groups, will tend to gang up on minorities such as property owners” and religious minorities); see also The Federalist No. 10, at 77 (James Madison) (Clinton Rossiter ed., 1961).


154 See Ronald D. Rotunda, The Powers of Congress Under Section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment After City of Boerne v. Flores, 32 Ind. L.R. 163, 170 (1998) (observing that Congress used its powers under Section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment to enact the ADA).


157 See City of Boerne v. Flores, 521 U.S. 507, 517–19 (1997) (finding that Section Five of the Fourteenth Amendment is to be used to enforce the Amendment’s other provisions, thereby giving Congress only remedial powers).

158 Id. at 508 (“While the line between measures that remedy or prevent unconstitutional actions and measures that make a substantive change in the governing law is not easy to discern, and Congress must have wide latitude in determining where it lies, the distinction exists and must be observed.”).
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Congress responded to the mandate required by the Court in Cleburne by enacting the ADA. In denying intermediate scrutiny for people with disabilities, one of the four reasons cited by the Court in Cleburne was that it was up to the legislature, not the judiciary, to decide how this large and diverse group should be accommodated.\textsuperscript{159} Congress, in passing the ADA and making explicit that it intended for its contents to protect people with disabilities, merely followed the Court’s guidance. Congress’s representations that people with disabilities are a discrete and insular minority provides powerful evidence that people with disabilities meet this requirement for finding a suspect class.\textsuperscript{160}

Some, including the Supreme Court, have expressed concern that intermediate scrutiny would require the legislature to justify all of its efforts to a greater extent, which in turn may deter or impede actions benefitting people with disabilities.\textsuperscript{161} It is true that intermediate scrutiny requires an important governmental purpose, so any government action would need to be clearly justified for it to be upheld under this standard.\textsuperscript{162} But because intermediate scrutiny is satisfied where the legislature shows an important reason,\textsuperscript{163} and because the Court suggests that legislation favoring a suspect class will be reviewed less strictly than legislation discriminating against a suspect class,\textsuperscript{164} this criticism lacks foundation in constitutional doctrine.

It could be argued that people with disabilities cannot be a “discrete and insular minority” because a politically powerless minority could not

\textsuperscript{159} Cf. City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Ctr., 473 U.S. 432, 442–43 (1985) (stating that addressing the problems of the “large and diversified group” of persons with disabilities “is a difficult and often a technical matter, very much a task for legislators guided by qualified professionals and not by the perhaps ill-informed opinions of the judiciary”).

\textsuperscript{160} See 42 U.S.C. §§ 12101–12213 (2016) (demonstrating that in passing the ADA, Congress acted to protect people with disabilities, which was arguably a direct response to the Court in Cleburne asserting that this was the job of the legislature).

\textsuperscript{161} See Cleburne at 444. But see Bd. of Regents v. Roth, 408 U.S. 564, 591 (1972) (Marshall, J., dissenting) (stating that the government’s burden is ameliorated where it decided the legislation carefully).


\textsuperscript{163} See id. (recognizing gender as a quasi-suspect class warranting intermediate scrutiny).

\textsuperscript{164} See, e.g., Grutter v. Bollinger, 539 U.S. 306 (2003). In Grutter, the Court reaffirmed its commitment to applying strict scrutiny to review racial classifications, but upheld an affirmative action policy. See id. at 326, 343. To achieve this result, the Court applied a lower level of scrutiny, though it said it was applying strict scrutiny. See id. at 309 (stating the test for strict scrutiny, but using a test more flexible than narrow tailoring and stating that “narrow tailoring does not require exhaustion of every conceivable race-neutral alternative,” which would typically be required). According to Calvin Massey, the Court “implicitly recognized (but refused to expressly acknowledge) that some uses of race are considerably more invidious than others, and explicitly recognized that some uses of race are not wrongful at all.” Calvin Massey, The New Formalism: Requiem for Tiered Scrutiny? 6 U. Pa. J. Const. L. 945, 976 (2004). The approach applied in Grutter to examine whether the non-minority racial classification was a suspect classification suggests that the Court will similarly examine laws which benefit a given suspect class less stringently than laws which discriminate against that class. See, e.g., Nina A. Kohn, Rethinking the Constitutionality of Age Discrimination: A Challenge to a Decades-Old Consensus, 44 U.C. Davis L. Rev. 213 (2010); cf. Shelby Cty. v. Holder, 570 U.S. 529 (2013) (applying strict scrutiny to find Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act unconstitutional, even though the Act benefits communities of color).
have been successful in passing a piece of legislation with the scope and force of the ADA. Indeed, in 2007, 56.7 million people in the United States had a disability, representing 19% of the United States population. This figure alone represents a significant voting block, and does not include the numerous other disability advocates and allies. Such an argument mirrors Justice Scalia’s dissent in *Romer v. Evans*, in which he contended that queer individuals did not lack political power in a way that rendered them discrete and insular, citing the example of the massive and well-funded efforts to defeat anti-LGBTQ state constitutional amendments. Justice Scalia argued that the sheer economic power of the LGBTQ community was alone sufficient to remove them from the “discrete and insular minority” category. However, the majority in *Romer* responded that it did not need to consider the political powerlessness of the LGBTQ community as a group because the law at issue’s “sheer breadth” was “so discontinuous” with the reasons offered to justify it that it could only have been motivated by animus.

With respect to disability, one need only look to empirical data to see that people with disabilities have some of the highest national unemployment rates and are among the most impoverished in the United States. The unemployment rate of people with disabilities aged 21–64 in 2016 was approximately 10.5% (including all disabilities within the national definition), compared to the United States average of approximately 4.6% in the same year. People with disabilities thus fit cleanly within the definition of a politically powerless group. And as with the LGBTQ community, the assumption that all people with disabilities possess political power ignores the

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165 See Cleburne, 473 U.S. at 445; see also Waterstone, supra note 7, at 538–39 (observing that the Court perceives legislative action as “bely[ing]” any claims of political powerlessness).


167 Although the *Romer* Court uses terminology such as “gays and lesbians” and “homosexual persons,” this Note uses the terms “LGBTQ” and “queer communities” to be more inclusive and more accurately reflect the diversity of the individuals directly affected by the Court’s decision.

168 See *Romer v. Evans*, 517 U.S. 620, 645–46 (1996) (Scalia, J., dissenting) (“[B]ecause those who engage in homosexual conduct tend to reside in disproportionate numbers in certain communities, have high disposable income, and, of course, care about homosexual-rights issues much more ardently than the public at large, they possess political power much greater than their numbers, both locally and statewide.” (internal citations omitted)). Although the opinion does not mention the term “discrete and insular minority,” it describes the qualities of discrete and insular minority in its reasoning.

169 Id.

170 Id. at 631.

diversity within the greater community and erases members of the group who are poor, persons of color, and members of other disadvantaged groups who may lack political power. As a result, characterizing people with disabilities as politically powerful entrenches the power of majority groups, such as white and wealthy individuals, without pursuing the animating goal of the suspect class doctrine—that is, to correct political process failures.\textsuperscript{172} The critique’s absurdity becomes even more pronounced when one considers how many other larger groups, like communities of color, women, and transgender individuals with disproportionately less political power, have collectively managed to accomplish enormous political feats, such as the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, the Civil Rights Act, and implementation of the Civil Rights Act to provide recourse for individuals discriminated on the basis of gender identity.\textsuperscript{173} In light of Justice Marshall’s argument in dissent, which cites the long and grotesque history of discrimination affecting people with disabilities,\textsuperscript{174} it is clear that the passage of the ADA does not provide a persuasive argument that people with disabilities are not a discrete and insular minority.

Though the Court in \textit{Cleburne} calls people with disabilities a “large and diversified group,”\textsuperscript{175} almost no discussion is made as to the relevance of the group’s size to its political clout. In other situations, like with women and aliens,\textsuperscript{176} the Court has not been dissuaded by the large size of a group in identifying it as a quasi-suspect class.\textsuperscript{177} The size of the class may have some bearing on the group’s qualification for suspect class status, and individuals with different disabilities may experience the world differently. But “ableism”—notions about people with disabilities held by people without disabilities—rigs the political process in a way that subjugates the political power of people with disabilities consistently, like a de facto discrimination of women. Thus, the argument that the group is one of substantial size should not

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\textsuperscript{172} See Hutchinson, \textit{supra} note 123, at 979–81.

\textsuperscript{173} For example, the Fourteenth Amendment was passed in 1868 at a time when African-Americans in the United States had almost no political power, because they were simultaneously given the right to vote. See U.S. \textit{Const.}, amends. XIII, IV. In addition, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (“EEOC”) prohibits sex discrimination through Title VII. See 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000e–2000e-17 (2016). This has been interpreted to include discrimination on the basis of gender identity. See \textit{Oncale v. Sundowner Offshore Servs.}, 523 U.S. 75, 82 (1998); see also \textit{Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins}, 490 U.S. 228 (1989). It has also been interpreted to include discrimination against transgender individuals. See \textit{Chavez v. Credit Nation Auto Sales, LLC}, 641 F. App’x 883, 892 (11th Cir. 2016) (reversing summary judgment for employer on plaintiff’s claim that she was terminated from her job as a mechanic because she was transgender); see also \textit{Glenn v. Brumby}, 663 F.3d 1312, 1316–17 (11th Cir. 2011) (finding that the defendant discriminated against plaintiff because she was transitioning from male to female).


\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Id.} at 442.

\textsuperscript{176} See Graham v. Richardson, 403 U.S. 365 (1971).

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hinder the status of people with disabilities to receive intermediate scrutiny constitutional protection.

In further support of the argument that people with disabilities are a discrete and insular minority, the ADA’s preamble recognizes the historic restrictions, limitations, and political powerlessness of the group writ large. The Act enumerates examples of “intentional exclusion” in architectural, transportation, and communications design. While the legislature cannot designate a group as a suspect class (although Congress can recognize a group to be protected under the Fourteenth Amendment), the examples cited by Congress serve as a formidable reminder that discrimination is not just historic, but contemporary, and relegates people with disabilities to a position of relative socio-political powerlessness. The ADA continues to describe how, unlike individuals who have historically been excluded due to their race, gender, national origin, religion, or age, people with disabilities had no legal recourse for much of history to “redress such discrimination.” Moreover, the ultimate vehicle for political participation, voting, is still denied to people with intellectual disabilities in many states.

ii. History of Discrimination

In San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez, the Court suggested that a suspect class must have experienced a “history of purposeful unequal treatment.” The Court has emphasized historical discrimination in each and every recognition of a suspect or quasi-suspect class, and it remains a critical consideration for equal protection recognition.


180 Id. § 12101(a)(5) (citing examples up to the time of the ADA’s passage of evidence of prevalent discrimination against people with disabilities).

181 Id. § 12101(a)(4).


183 See San Antonio Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 1, 28 (1973) (finding that wealth was not a suspect class because the group lacked a history of discrimination).

184 See Kerrigan v. Comm’r of Pub. Health, 957 A.2d 407, 427 (Conn. 2008) (“[T]he Supreme Court has placed far greater weight—indeed, it invariably has placed dispositive weight—on . . . whether the group has been the subject of long-standing and invidious discrimination.”); see also Fronterio v. Richardson, 411 U.S. 677, 684 (1973) (finding gender did not warrant rational basis scrutiny because of a long history of discrimination).
As described above, people with disabilities have undoubtedly experienced a history of pervasive discrimination. The *Cleburne* majority and dissent agreed that the city’s animus towards people with disabilities in its decision to strike down the city zoning regulation reflected a long history of “grotesque mistreatment.” In addition, the Court noted that the visibility of the trait and historic discrimination has bred impermissible stereotypes. Like gender, disability can, though does not always, manifest in highly visible ways. And here, too, if the Court continues to be vigilant in ferreting out instances where laws are based on impermissible stereotypes about individuals, it is likely, in the case of disabilities, to find stereotypes as evidence of historic discrimination. For example, until as late as 1970, municipalities criminalized people with disability through “ugly laws,” which prohibited people who were diseased, maimed, or in any way deformed from public spaces, as a mechanism to eradicate beggars from city streets. And some state laws still prohibit people from having a family or voting, based on notions about the capabilities of people with disabilities. Historical evidence of discrimination weighs strongly in favor of a finding of quasi-suspect classification for people with disabilities and is perhaps the least controversial argument to that end.

**iii. Immutability of the Trait**

Immutability presents the most formidable challenge to quasi-suspect class recognition for people with disabilities. In earlier opinions, the Court has defined immutability as a characteristic “determined solely by accident of birth.” But in litigation about whether sexual orientation was a suspect

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185 Buck v. Bell, 274 U.S. 200, 207 (1927) (stating Justice Holmes’s infamous words, “[three generations of imbeciles are enough”).


187 See *Frontiero*, 411 U.S. at 686 (noticing that historic discrimination and impermissible stereotypes are related).


189 See generally Adoption of Kay C., 278 Cal. Rptr. 907, 909–15 (Cal. Ct. App. 1991) (finding that California statute which allowed a court to set aside an adoption for a child with an undisclosed mental disability could be upheld because “most fundamentally, the constitutionality of a measure under the equal protection clause does not depend on a court’s assessment of the empirical success or failure of the measure’s provisions” and “whether in fact the Act will promote [objectives] is not the question: the Equal Protection Clause is satisfied by our conclusion that the [state] Legislature could rationally have decided that [it] . . . might do so”); *In re Christina A.*, 261 Cal. Rptr. 903, 907 (Cal. Ct. App. 1989) (holding that the California Welfare and Institutions Code, which required reunification services for parents and children, but denied them to “mentally disabled parents” did not violate the constitutional guarantee of equal protection under a rational basis standard because “[i]t is reasonable for the state, before expending its limited resources for reunification services, to distinguish between those who would benefit from such services and those would not”); *In re Eugene W.*, 105 Cal. Rptr. 736, 739–41 (Cal. Ct. App. 1972) (rejecting an equal protection challenge to a law which authorizes the state to terminate the parental rights of an individual due to the individual’s mental, not physical, illness).

190 See *supra* note 140.

191 See *Frontiero*, 411 U.S. at 686.
At first glance, disability appears to be an immutable trait because, generally, a person with a disability cannot choose to rid him or herself of the disability. However, many disabilities develop over time, meaning that they are by definition mutable. A person who previously lived without a disability may develop one later in life as a result of age, accident, or pregnancy. One in four twenty-year-olds in 2013 in the United States will develop a disability before they retire. In developed nations such as the United States, where life expectancy exceeds seventy years, people spend an average of eight years, or 11.5% of their life, living with one or more disabilities. This significantly erodes the argument that disability is a binary yes-no characterization, like race, and as a result, an immutable characteristic.

At the same time, with the exception of pregnancy, people have little control over and generally do not choose to incur a disability. In this sense, it is analogous to one’s status as a documented or undocumented immigrant in the United States. When considering laws that discriminate on the basis of national origin, the court has not considered undocumented status to be an absolutely immutable characteristic, since it might, in some cases, be the “product” of conscious action (that is, choosing not to become a citizen or overstaying a visa). Therefore, the Court has denied suspect classification status for immigrant adults. But, where undocumented immigrant children were excluded from public education, the Court in Plyer v. Doe nonetheless struck down the ordinance because the children had no control over their

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193 See Cleburne Living Ctr. v. City of Cleburne, 726 F.2d 191, 192 n.2 (5th Cir. 1984) (reprinting trial testimony of Dr. Roos). Dr. Phillip Roos, an expert on intellectual disabilities, testified at a Cleburne hearing that intellectual disability is an immutable condition, stating: “Mental retardation is a problem of a deficit in intellectual development and social adaption. Its onset is sometimes from birth or during childhood . . . it is irreversible. By which I mean there may be some amelioration, but to date it is not a curable condition.” Id.
196 See Plyer v. Doe, 457 U.S. 202, 219–20 (1982) (showing that while the Court struck down both a state statute denying funding for education to illegal alien children and a school district’s attempt to charge illegal aliens an annual tuition fee, the Court also acknowledged that aliens were protected under the Fourteenth Amendment).
197 Id. (quoting Trimble v. Gordon, 430 U.S. 762, 770 (1977) (stating that even where aliens remain in the United States as a “product of their own unlawful conduct,” these arguments do not apply to their children because children of “illegal entrants” did not elect to enter the United States in contravention of law because children “can affect neither their parents’ conduct nor their own status”).
198 Id. at 220.
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documentation status—their parents did. Similarly, in Obergefell v. Hodges, Justice Kennedy recognized that sexual orientation and sexual identity are immutable characteristics, citing the Amicus brief from the American Psychological Association that stated that most gay men and lesbians do not experience their sexual orientation as a “voluntary choice.”

Considered from the control-based definition of immutability, individuals with disabilities also lack the agency over the characteristic that the Court attempts to police with the immutability criteria. In situations where someone cannot control their membership in the group, like disability, the case for agency—and thus, mutability—is weak. One cannot choose to opt into a disability (again, with the exception of pregnancy) or opt out. The unfairness of being discriminated against for something outside of one’s control “suggests the kind of ‘class or caste’ treatment that the Fourteenth Amendment was designed to abolish.”

Further, the Court has seemed to retreat from the immutability factor and many scholars have called for its elimination altogether because immutability presents so many conceptual difficulties. In San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez, where Plaintiffs challenged a local property tax regime, the Court completely ignored immutability as a qualification for suspect classification. Instead, it focused on the “traditional” criteria for suspect classification (i.e., discrete and insular minority status and historic discrimination). In addition, qualities once thought immutable by the Court may no longer be appropriately labeled as such, like gender. In Frontiero v. Richardson, which considered whether a law providing military benefits to wives, but not husbands, was constitutional, the plurality wrote

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199 Id.
200 This word choice is employed in the Amicus brief.
202 Jessica A. Clarke, Against Immutability, 125 YALE L.J. 2, 16 (2015) (arguing for the abolition of immutability as a criterion for equal protection because it presents ambiguities like this one and arguing that immutability as a factor is more closely tied to agency over the characteristic than immutability in the technical sense).
203 In some situations, such as substance abuse or a reckless driving accident, an individual makes a conscious choice that results in their disability, but this is not the norm. Moreover, it seems unlikely that individuals who opt into potentially dangerous conduct see themselves as affirmatively ‘opting in’ to becoming disabled.
204 Plyler, 457 U.S. at 217 n.14; see also Clarke, supra note 202, at 16.
205 See generally Janet E. Halley, Sexual Orientation and the Politics of Biology: A Critique of the Argument from Immutability, 46 STAN. L. REV. 503 (1994) (emphasizing the problematic nature of immutability as a characteristic); Cass R. Sunstein, Homosexuality and the Constitution, 70 ISRAEL L.J. 1, 9 (1995) (stating that “[i]mmutability is neither a necessary nor sufficient basis for treatment as a ‘suspect class’”); Kenji Yoshino, Assimilationist Bias in Equal Protection: The Visibility Presumption and the Case of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell,” 108 YALE L.J. 485, 494–95 (1998) (asserting that “courts have begun to withdraw the immutability factor and... recent academic commentary seems univocal in calling for its retirement”).
206 See 411 U.S. 1, 28 (1973).
207 Id.
that, "sex, like race and national origin, is an immutable characteristic determined solely by accident of birth." However, gender is now generally understood as a spectrum, and something that can be changed. Many courts now ask whether the characteristic is a core trait or condition that one cannot or should not be required to abandon, a definition which has been called the "new immutability" standard. Under this approach, disability should be considered immutable because it is not something that one can abandon, nor something one should be forced to abandon. Thus, disability, whether under the control theory or the new immutability standard, qualifies as an immutable trait, providing strong support for intermediate scrutiny review. But the importance of immutability, and even whether it is a workable standard for finding suspect class status, has been called into question.

**iv. Relevance of the Trait to the Classification**

When determining suspect classification, the Court pays some consideration to whether a group’s defining characteristic is relevant to the legislation in question. With respect to disability, the Court asks if the characteristic (that is, the disability) is relevant to a person’s ability to perform or contribute to society. As the Court has announced, “the basic concept of our system [is] that legal burdens should bear some relationship to individual responsibility.”

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209 See Clarke, supra note 202, at 27; see also Whitewood v. Wolf, 992 F. Supp. 2d 410, 429 (M.D. Pa. 2014) (holding that sexual orientation is "so fundamental to one’s identity that a person should not be required to abandon [it]").
210 See Clarke, supra note 202, at 6–7 (describing the “new immutability” standard, which asks not whether the characteristic is not changeable, but whether it is a core characteristic to one’s person).
211 Yoshino, Assimilationist Bias, supra note 205, at 494–95 (asserting that “courts have begun to withdraw the immutability factor and . . . recent academic commentary seems universal in calling for its retirement”).
212 See Michael A. Helfand, The Usual Suspect Classifications: Criminals, Aliens, and the Future of Same-Sex Marriage, 12 U. Pa. J. of Const. L. 1, 3 (2009) (“Other scholars have noted that immutability seems to be a proxy for the relevance of a particular trait to a given governmental enactment, and a poor proxy at that.”)
founded—race, gender, alienage, for example—“tend to be irrelevant to any proper legislative goal.”\textsuperscript{215}

Admittedly, the presence of a disability is often highly relevant to the legislature’s interest, particularly in the workforce. This is the very goal of the reasonable accommodation, which aims to bring a person’s functionality to par with the requirements of the job.\textsuperscript{216} Also, as the Court acknowledged in \textit{Cleburne}, the legislature may have an interest in providing a social safety net for people with disabilities,\textsuperscript{217} including through housing and workplace supports. However, invidious stereotypes about one’s ability, rather than the relevance of a particular trait, may never justify legislation, even under rational basis review.\textsuperscript{218} For example, in \textit{United States v. Virginia}, the Court analyzed a policy of the Virginia Military Institute (“VMI”) of admitting only male students.\textsuperscript{219} The State had established a separate university for women, but it was found to be unequal in opportunity and rigor.\textsuperscript{220} The Court found that VMI’s admissions policy was based on impermissible stereotypes about the relevance of gender to the task of attending a military institution.\textsuperscript{221} A tradition of discriminating against women, which resulted in stereotypes that guided policy, provided an insufficient justification for perpetuating this status quo in VMI’s admissions.\textsuperscript{222} Similarly, in \textit{Frontiero}, the Court found that traditional notions of gender roles in generating family income were an impermissible basis upon which to write a law about dependent military ben-

\textsuperscript{215} Id. at 217 n.14.
\textsuperscript{216} See, e.g., 42 U.S.C. § 12111(9) (2016) (defining reasonable accommodation as: “(A) making existing facilities used by employees readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities; and (B) job restructuring, part-time or modified work schedules, reassignment to a vacant position, acquisition or modification of equipment or devices, appropriate adjustment or modifications of examinations, training materials or policies, the provision of qualified readers or interpreters, and other similar accommodations for individuals with disabilities”).
\textsuperscript{217} See City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Ctr., 473 U.S. 432, 444 (1985) (stating that legislation supporting people with disabilities is “not only legitimate but also desirable”).
\textsuperscript{218} See id. at 441–42 (striking down city ordinance founded upon impermissible assumptions about people with disabilities); see also Romer v. Evans, 517 U.S. 620, 632 (1996) (invalidating a Colorado constitutional amendment that repealed all state and local laws protecting homosexuals from discrimination because the “sheer breadth” of the law was “so discontinuous” with reasons offered for it that the amendment seemed inexplicable as anything other than animus towards the class it affected); Metro. Life Ins. Co. v. Ward, 470 U.S. 869, 883 (1985) (invalidating an Alabama tax burdening statute directed at foreign companies); Dep’t of Agric. v. Moreno, 413 U.S. 528, 535 (1973) (stating that unfounded stereotypes of “unrelated households” and their tendency to perpetrate fraud was impermissible even under rational basis review).
\textsuperscript{220} See id. at 526–27 (finding that the parallel program was unequal because of lower average SAT entrance scores, fewer faculty members with a Ph.D., teachers with lower salaries, and limited degree offerings for students).
\textsuperscript{221} See id. at 549 (rejecting the state’s assertions that differences in training between men and women were “justified pedagogically” based on ‘important differences between men and women and developmental needs,” and finding that these were instead stereotypes based on women as a group).
\textsuperscript{222} See id. at 566.
And in Mississippi University for Women v. Hogan, where a male qualified applicant was denied admission to a nursing program on the basis of sex, the Court found that differential treatment between women and men lacked a factual foundation and instead reflected impermissible social assumptions about women’s capability in the educational environment. Therefore, in determining the standard of review applicable to people with disabilities, the Court must remain vigilant to calibrate the standard to the relevance of the trait in question, and not, as the defendants in Virginia and Frontiero tried to argue, to invidious stereotypes about the relevance of a particular trait.

Disability may, in some cases, bear a relationship to the ability of the individual. For example, a city ordinance requiring wheelchair ramps on public buildings reflects an understanding that individuals in wheelchairs cannot traverse up steps. Similarly, an accommodation for Braille books recognizes that a blind student does not have the same ability to read a textbook as a non-blind student. However, these changes do not assume that the person in a wheelchair’s contribution once up the stairs will be lesser than that of a non-wheelchair bound person, nor that the child with a Braille book is any less capable of academic success than a child with a non-Braille book. Where assumptions are made about one’s capability based on a trait, the Court should continue to find those justifications impermissible.

Disability may be a trait that bears so heavily on ability that the equal protection framework is inapplicable, because people with disabilities cannot be treated equally, and if they were, there could be no accommodation at all. However, given that this argument serves no productive purpose in harnessing the capabilities of people with disabilities for productive social purposes, the Court is unlikely to find it compelling. Through intermediate scrutiny, the Court is best positioned to police invidious and impermissible stereotypes about the capabilities of people with disabilities.

v. Intermediate Scrutiny is Appropriate for People with Disabilities

By the early 1980s, the Supreme Court had developed several key criteria for identifying a suspect or quasi-suspect class. To decide whether a group was a suspect class, the Court looked to: (1) whether the group was a discrete and insular minority caused by political powerlessness, (2) there was a history of discrimination against the group, (3) the immutability of the trait, and (4) the relevance of that trait to legitimate legislative goals. The Court has never required all of these factors for a class to be considered suspect, and it appears that factors one and two are the most important to
and the most closely scrutinized. While disability may lack some of the characteristics required for suspect classification, people with disabilities are a discrete and insular minority and have experienced a history of pervasive and egregious discrimination. The application of the suspect class factors indicates that the Court should consider people with disabilities a quasi-suspect class warranting intermediate scrutiny.

IV. UNDER INTERMEDIATE SCRUTINY, GARRETT WOULD RESULT IN A RATIONAL OUTCOME

a. Applying Intermediate Scrutiny to the facts of Board of Trustees of the University of Alabama v. Garrett

Had the plaintiffs in Garrett, a nurse with breast cancer and an asthmatic security guard, had their ADA claims considered under an intermediate scrutiny regime, this Note contends that the Court would have allowed them a reasonable accommodation from the State. Under intermediate scrutiny, a state must provide a substantive justification for a policy that discriminates against a group of individuals and may not rely on the presumptive permissibility of its program. This is unlike rational basis review, where the plaintiff must overcome a strong presumption of constitutional validity. Thus, under intermediate scrutiny, the State of Alabama would likely lose.

Though the litigants in Garrett were not able to expound on the State’s purported justifications (because they would not have been required under rational basis review had the Court reached the merits), one can imagine what justifications the state of Alabama may have advanced. For example, the state could have justified the denial of accommodations on the basis of administrative efficiency, economic feasibility, state fiscal responsibility, or all three. The state may also have advanced an interest in an uninterrupted state work force, an interest particularly strong in hospitals given the necessity of continuous and quality care for patients by employees like Ms. Garrett. While these arguments might have succeeded under rational basis review, the Court has consistently rejected purported interests such as administrative convenience under intermediate scrutiny. Therefore, if the

Strauss, supra note 124, at 139–40 n.23 (quoting San Antonio Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 1, 28 (1973) (“A suspect class entitled to strict scrutiny is one ‘saddled with such disabilities, or subjected to a history of purposeful unequal treatment, or relegated to such a position of political powerlessness as to command extraordinary protection from the majoritarian political process.’” (emphasis added))).  
227 See Strauss, supra note 124, at 148–49 (stating that the Court emphasizes discrete and insular minority status and history of discrimination most in its opinions).  
228 Bd. of Trs. of the Univ. of Ala. v. Garrett, 531 U.S. 356 (2001).  
229 This is ignoring for the purposes of argument the Eleventh Amendment questions presented by the case in Garrett and assuming the Court had reached the merits.  
Court had reached the merits, the State’s justifications would very likely have failed intermediate scrutiny review and the plaintiffs would have been permitted their employment accommodation.

Even if an important state interest is recognized under intermediate scrutiny, the state must still establish that the denial of the accommodation is reasonably related to the important interest proffered.231 Under this hypothetical, the State of Alabama could have argued that limiting the scope of reasonable accommodations was substantially related to reducing administrative costs and increasing the State’s efficiency in its program delivery because reasonable accommodations cost money and take time. Allowing Ms. Garrett time off for medical treatments would likely necessitate temporary workers and additional training, or enhance the burden on the remaining employees by requiring shift coverage, possibly impacting workplace morale. Similarly, enforcing the University’s no smoking policy for Mr. Ash’s benefit would require time and manpower that could be invested elsewhere (policing offenders, placing signs, etc.). The State of Alabama could have contended that its systems were reasonably designed to promote administrative efficiency and proper functioning of state government, both important government interests.232 Even if those interests were accepted as important, the denial of the requested accommodations would likely have failed the “substantially related” requirement under intermediate scrutiny.233 It would be difficult to argue that not enforcing a no-smoking policy would advance administrative functions. In fact, having a rule that is effectively and consistently carried out, like a no-smoking policy, may actually advance those functions. More importantly, the Court has consistently rejected as “substantially related” arguments related to advancing administrative functions.234

Therefore, if the Court had reached the merits in Garrett and considered it under intermediate scrutiny, it would almost certainly have resulted in a different outcome. As a result, the State of Alabama would likely have been required to make reasonable accommodations for both plaintiffs. This would be more in line with the spirit of the ADA, which intended to remedy historic discrimination and provide accommodations for people with disabilities to contribute to the workplace, exactly as the plaintiffs in Garrett requested. This hypothetical underscores the inherent limitations of rational basis review when applied to disability-rights claims and its practical significance in limiting people with disabilities from accessing their full suite of rights under the ADA. Failure to recognize people with disabilities as a suspect or

232 See Orr v. Orr, 440 U.S. 268, 280–82 (1979) (articulating that intermediate scrutiny requires the law be “reasonably designed” to promote the important interest).
233 Id. (finding that, where the purpose could have been served by a gender-neutral means, it was not substantially related).
234 See Frontiero, 411 U.S. at 688–89.
quasi-suspect class subverts the purpose of the Equal Protection Clause, both by refusing to treat individuals who meet the criteria for suspect classification with the greater protection that the Constitution guarantees, and by limiting the ADA from fulfilling its rights-protective legislative purpose.

b. Reconsidering Irving v. Tatro Under Intermediate Scrutiny

Lending further credence to the practical benefits of the intermediate scrutiny approach, under an intermediate scrutiny regime, Tatro’s well-reasoned outcome would not have changed. In Tatro, the Court did not apply rational basis review, and Amber Tatro was provided the accommodation of catheterizations that allowed her to attend school. Under rational basis scrutiny, however, her claim would have very likely failed in light of the School District’s stated objections that such an accommodation would lead to an onslaught of requests for every conceivable medical service and expose it to increased liability for injury or accident.

If Tatro had been decided on Equal Protection grounds under intermediate scrutiny review, the result would likely have been consistent with the Court’s actual result because the school district’s justifications would likely not be considered important interests. In terms of limiting the number of medical services required, the Court has consistently found interests of administrative convenience and reducing costs to be insufficient under intermediate scrutiny. While the School District’s interest in limiting liability could be characterized as an effort to reduce costs (which would probably also fail under intermediate scrutiny), this second justification could also be considered an important state interest because the time and energy not spent litigating could be spent on the central mission of the District: educating and developing young citizens. However, this argument would essentially amount to facilitating the administrative convenience of the government’s mission, an interest which has consistently failed under intermediate scrutiny.

Even if the District’s interest in reducing its liability exposure were considered an important interest by the Court, the challenged policy in Tatro

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235 The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment requires that no state deny any person equal protection of the laws. See U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 1. After Carolene Products, courts began building a framework for heightened scrutiny of laws that may violate the Equal Protection Clause by considering history of discrimination, political powerlessness, and immutability. See Waterstone, supra note 7, at 545 (finding that the bases for suspect scrutiny were drawn directly from United States v. Carolene Products Co., 304 U.S. 144 (1938)).


237 See id. at 893.

238 See Frontiero, 411 U.S. at 690.


240 Id.
would likely not be considered substantially related to that interest. If the District were concerned with its liability exposure, there existed better, more closely related policies to meet this objective, including purchasing additional liability insurance or outfitting the school with safety measures like ramps, nursing stations, and elevators for future medical services requests. On balance, it is unlikely Tatro, a well-reasoned decision, would have resulted in a different outcome under intermediate scrutiny review, providing a further indication that intermediate scrutiny advances equities for people with disabilities.

V. PRactical BURDENS OF RATIONAL BASIS ScrUTiny FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Piling on to the absurd consequences of the rational basis standard of review for people with disabilities, the highly deferential standard creates other deleterious downstream consequences. Though one may question whether quasi-suspect class recognition for people with disabilities reflects a mere symbolic gesture without any real consequences, this is patently incorrect. In reality, the continued application of the rational basis standard to disability cases has numerous practical and significant consequences. People with disabilities remain underrepresented and marginalized, not only through their lack of protection in the legal system, but also by laws about voting, life choices, and education.241

Many people with disabilities reside at the outer ambit of statutory protection.242 A New York judge described people with disabilities as “the most discriminated minority in our nation.”243 While an individual might be entitled to protection under the Equal Protection Clause, the flimsy rational basis review standard required after Cleburne means that the Supreme Court often interprets the ADA to deny that protection through the refusal of a reasonable accommodation in the workplace or school. The absence of any rigorous constitutional protection allows the Supreme Court and other actors to narrow the scope of ADA protections through interpretations of “reasonable accommodation” and “undue hardship” that do not comport with the broader protections Congress intended.244

241 Id.

242 See Waterstone, supra note 7, at 531 (observing that members of the disability community “have been more at the fringes . . . and had a harder time translating legislative success into the promises of full citizenship”).


Additionally, the ADA is currently unable to protect people with disabilities from state law regimes due to the high degree of deference given to defendants under rational basis review. This has had detrimental consequences for many people with disabilities. While recent data is lacking, a survey of voting regulations in all fifty states and Washington, D.C. in 1976 revealed that nineteen states denied the right to vote to those defined as "idiots," two denied the right to vote to anyone institutionalized, and two denied the right to vote to those adjudicated as incompetent. In Justice Marshall’s words, “prejudice, once let loose, is not easily cabined,” and with respect to the enfranchisement of people with disabilities, prejudice has systematically isolated people with disabilities from political participation. Not until 1982 were public education opportunities available to people with disabilities, despite an awareness that “lengthy and continuing isolation of the [intellectually disabled] has perpetuated ignorance, irrational fears, and stereotyping that long have plagued them.” Even as late as 1950, twenty-eight states retained sterilization statutes in their laws. Many states still have laws prohibiting marriage with handicapped persons or between handi-

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245 See generally Bd. of Trs. of the Univ. of Ala. v. Garrett, 531 U.S. 356 (2001) (deferring to the University of Alabama under the doctrine of state sovereign immunity); see also Ky Const. § 145(3) (providing that “idiots and insane persons” shall not have the right to vote); Grutter v. Bollinger, 539 U.S. 306, 328 (2003) (holding that the state deserves a “degree of deference” under constitutional tests).

246 See Adoption of Kay C., 278 Cal. Rptr. 907, 915 (Cal. Ct. App. 1991) (stating, where plaintiffs challenged a state statute authorizing a court to set aside adoption of a child with undisclosed mental disabilities, and California offered justification in promoting the state’s interest in adoption, that “[w]e need not state our opinion on the matter, because “most fundamentally, the constitutionality of a measure under the equal protection clause does not depend on a court’s assessment of the empirical success or failure of the measure provision . . .”); Does 1-5 v. Chandler, 83 F.3d 1150, 1151–56 (9th Cir. 1996) (reviewing a Hawaii licensing statute under the Equal Protection Clause, citing Cleburne and upholding “preservation of . . . fiscal integrity” as a legitimate and rationally related public purpose); In re Harhut, 385 N.W.2d 305, 311 (Minn. 1986) (considering a state statute allowing for indefinite commitment of persons with mental retardation, citing Cleburne and replying, “the distinction between commitment periods is based on the legislative judgment that mental retardation is, unlike chemical dependency or mental illness, a condition not usually susceptible of great or rapid improvement. The legislature decided that indeterminate commitment subject to judicial review on the motion of the patient was the more effective and efficient way to deal with the states responsibility to treat mentally retarded persons. This is a legitimate public purpose and it is not clear beyond a reasonable doubt that indeterminate commitment is an unreasonable means of assuring the state’s interests”).

247 Section VII: Items of Interest, 1 MENTAL DISABILITY L. REP. 231, 236 (1976).

248 City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Ctr., 473 U.S. 432, 464 (1985) (“As of 1979, most States still categorically disqualified ‘idiots’ from voting, without regard to individual capacity and with discretion to exclude left in the hands of low-level election officials.”).


250 Cleburne, 473 U.S. at 464.

Capped persons.\footnote{252 See, e.g., \textit{Ky. Rev. Stat. Ann.} § 402.020(1)(a) (West 1998); \textit{Mont. Code Ann.} § 40-1-402 (2017); \textit{see also} \textit{D.C. Code} § 46-404 (2018) (allowing annulment for marriage with a person with mental illness or disability); \textit{Beddow v. Beddow}, 257 S.W.2d 45, 48 (Ky. 1952) (quoting \textit{Jenkins v. Jenkins’ Heirs}, 32 Ky. 102, 104 (1834) (stating that “[a] person ‘of unsound mind’—an idiot, for example, is, as to all intellectual purposes, dead; and such a being, destitute of intellectual light and life, is as incapable as a dead body of being a husband or a wife in a legal, rational, or moral sense”); \textit{Marissa DeBellis, A Group Home Exclusively for Married Couples with Developmental Disabilities: A Natural Next Step}, \textit{28 Touro L. Rev.} 451, 455 (2012) (arguing that state statutes that disallowed marriage for people with disabilities were premised on the ideas of social productivity and eliminating people with disabilities).} State laws prohibit people with disabilities from entering the courts for protection of parental rights.\footnote{253 See \textit{generally} \textit{Adoption of Kay C.}, 278 Cal. Rptr. 907, 909–15 (Cal. Ct. App. 1991) (finding that California statute allowing a court to set aside an adoption for a child with an undisclosed mental disability could be upheld because “most fundamentally, the constitutionality of a measure under the equal protection clause does not depend on a court’s assessment of the empirical success or failure of the measure’s provisions” and “whether in fact the Act will promote [objectives] is not the question: the Equal Protection Clause is satisfied by our conclusion that the [state] Legislature could rationally have decided that [it] . . . might do so”); \textit{In re Christina A.}, 261 Cal. Rptr. 903, 907 (Cal. Ct. App. 1989) (holding that California Welfare and Institutions Code, which required reunification services for parents and children, but denied them to “mentally disabled parents” did not violate the constitutional guarantee of equal protection under a rational basis standard because “[i]t is reasonable for the state, before expending its limited resources for reunification services, to distinguish between those who would benefit from such services and those who would not”); \textit{In re Eugene W.}, 105 Cal. Rptr. 736, 739–41 (Cal. Ct. App. 1972) (rejecting an equal protection challenge to a law which authorizes the state to terminate the parental rights of an individual due to the individual’s mental, not physical, illness).} Despite the best efforts of people with disabilities and their allies, efforts to challenge state laws have been largely unsuccessful, in large part due to the precedent established by \textit{Cleburne}.\footnote{254 See \textit{generally} \textit{Cal. Ass’n of the Physically Handicapped v. FCC}, 721 F.2d 667, 670 (9th Cir. 1983) (refusing to hold that disabled individuals are a suspect class); \textit{Brown v. Sibley}, 650 F.2d 760, 766 (5th Cir. 1981) (holding that disabled individuals are not a suspect class); \textit{Upshur v. Love}, 474 F. Supp. 332, 337 (N.D. Cal. 1979) (commenting that physical handicap is more analogous to age than race and, therefore evokes only the rational basis standard).} A regime of intermediate scrutiny would mobilize and effectuate efforts to reverse the perverse and antiquated laws that remain on the books and make substantial strides towards reforming the prejudicial attitudes that underpin them.

\section*{Conclusion}

Constitutional law speaks to our normative identity as a community in a way that statutory law is unable to do. Symbolically, intermediate scrutiny would reflect the history of discrimination and relative political powerlessness of people with disabilities, motivate social consciousness towards equal opportunities for this group, and prevent the rights recognized by Congress in the ADA from becoming nullities. Practically, without intermediate scrutiny review of legislative action, people with disabilities will likely continue to struggle to attain the “promises of full citizenship”\footnote{255 See \textit{Waterstone}, \textit{supra} note 7, at 531.} because their arse-
nal of legal tools remains incomplete. To provide people with disabilities the self-determination and independence to which they are entitled, it is critical that this community has meaningful access to mainstream political, social, and economic systems. The application of rational basis review to claims under the ADA keeps people with disabilities from fully accessing the legal system to enforce their rights and advocate for accommodations that foster integration. This access can be recognized symbolically and practically by recognizing that rational basis review, as applied to disability, is quite simply irrational.