

Transportation Committee

SCR 4004

January 20, 2023

Chairman Clemens and members of the committee, my name is Rachel Hafner. I am the Executive Director for The Arc, Upper Valley in Grand Forks. I am providing your committee with written testimony and asking that you vote “do pass” on SCR 4004.

In my previous place of employment, I provided life skills training to adults with serious mental illness. This included transportation training in the city of Grand Forks. I helped people apply for and access the city bus, Dial-A-Ride paratransit, and senior rider services. It was important for them to know how to use the transportation system so that they could access places in the community, including but not limited to, essential services, housing, healthcare, education, and employment.

The City of Grand Forks does a good job of providing quality transportation services, which includes very courteous and helpful drivers and staff. There are, however, many gaps in the services that are available that should be addressed to make transportation more equitable, affordable, safe, and accessible. In my current role as Executive Director of an organization that advocates for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), it is my responsibility to advocate for better transportation services in Grand Forks and the surrounding region, which includes rural areas.

Transportation services in Grand Forks could improve if there were additional routes that covered more areas of the city, including rides to the west side of town in the industrial park area, where many people work, and more rides to the south side of town as the city continues to grow in that direction. Accessibility is also limited in some areas, forcing people to walk significant distances, sometimes having to cross major roadways, to access bus stops. In the wintertime this becomes more burdensome and unsafe because walkways and curb cutouts are not cleared of snow

and ice, and many bus stops do not have shelters to protect people from the extreme weather that we experience in North Dakota.

Another problem that needs to be addressed in Grand Forks is the limited hours of service. There is only one night bus in Grand Forks to cover the entire city, and there are limited hours on the weekend and holidays. This prevents people from being able to access the community when they need or want to. These limited hours of service extend to the senior rider service and paratransit.

Access to transportation is further limited by the fact that you must schedule rides with senior rider and paratransit at least 24 hours in advance, thus limiting people's opportunity to access the community when they need or want to. Rural communities have even more limited access to public transportation, preventing access to essential services, housing, healthcare, education, employment, and other resources that are not available in rural communities.

Cost is another prohibitive barrier to equitable transportation. People with disabilities who meet certain criteria, may qualify for reduced bus fare or may be able to access paratransit, which costs less than taking a regular taxicab. But many people do not qualify for reduced rates because they do not have a disability that qualifies. People who do not have disabilities but have lower or no income, do qualify for any discount programs, which again creates barriers to accessing the community.

Equity in transportation is a fundamental right and should be available to anyone regardless of disabilities, income, or where they live. Access to transportation creates social and financial equity, it promotes positive mental health, and a sense of belonging to the community. It increases physical activity and mobility, and it combats social exclusion.

Our organization believes that we should study transportation in our state because everyone should have access to equitable and affordable transportation options. Please vote "do pass" on SCR 4004. I am available by phone or email to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.

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