

Testimony for HB1013

To: Representative Mike Nathe, Chair, and Members of the ND House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education and Environment, 69th Legislative Session.

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Re: Testimony offered for SB2013, specifically for the appropriation to support the Talking Book Program in the ND State Library for the biennium of 2025 – 2027.

Greetings Chair Nathe, Vice Chair Swiontek, and Representatives Hanson Louser, Martinson, Richter, and Sanford, Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education and Environment.

I am testifying on my own behalf as well as for that of the **North Dakota Association of the Blind**, we are testifying in support of the budget request submitted for the Talking Book Program a division within the State Library in Bismarck for its services for the next biennium of 2025 - 2027.

Please note: A resolution in support of the biennial appropriation request for the Talking Book Program at the State Library adopted by North Dakota Association of the Blind, is also included with this testimony.

We are testifying in support of the Talking Book Program and strongly urge that it be maintained and strengthen in the budget for the 2023-2025 biennium.

The Talking Book Program at the North Dakota State Library continues as it has for the past 30 years to serve people with sight loss. Prior to 1995 when the program was instituted in North Dakota, North Dakotans who qualified for this program received their books from the State Library in South Dakota.

Talking Books is a nationwide federal program that produces audio books from printed books and materials. The program has been a part of the National Library Service (NLS) for decades.

Our Talking Book Program here in North Dakota has an impressive library of audio books and players that “can play “read” these books to people who are blind or visually impaired and others with reading disabilities who qualify for the program.

Over the many years of its existence, there have been thousands of people who are blind or visually impaired here in North Dakota who have relied on audio books from the talking book program at the State Library and have enjoyed countless hours of entertainment and has provided them with valuable information in their daily lives.

Below is a sample of people from around the state who have commented on and expressed their appreciation for our State's Talking Book Program:

- **"We are so impressed with the program and friendly service we receive from you. He would be lost without it. [He] uses it many times during the day and has it even in bed to listen. It is a wonderful gift for him." – Oakes**
- **"[The player] gave her hundreds of hours of pleasure. She listened to over 900 recordings. It was comforting to me and the rest of the family that she could continue to enjoy her stories. Thank you for providing the machine and tapes for her to enjoy." – Milnor**
- **"This service has been a lifeline to occupy her time while she is restricted to her room with the whole virus issues." – Watford City**
- **"I would like to personally THANK YOU for this program. It brought hours of joy to her and allowed her to discuss various books with her grandchildren. It was a big part of her later life, kept her mind sharp and filled her days." – Grand Forks**

Personally, I cannot express just how valuable this service has been to me. I like those whose comments are listed above, cannot fully express how valuable this service is to people who cannot read printed materials. Thankfully advances continue to be made in this program so the quality and quantity of available reading material continues to grow as well as the ways this material can be accessed.

State funding for the Talking Book program is vital to its existence, we strongly urge you to maintain and strengthen the Talking Book Program, without hyperbole it is and has been a life changer for many.

Briefly about North Dakota Association of the Blind (NDAB): You could say that North Dakota Association of the Blind is an organization of and for people who are blind or visually impaired. We are a statewide membership organization founded 89 years ago in 1936. A majority of our members are blind or sight impaired. We provide educational, mentorship, networking, social and recreational opportunities for members and nonmembers. As an organization, we strongly advocate for blindness specific rehabilitation skills training, employment opportunities, and adaptations that will enhance and improve the lives of people who are blind and visually impaired. We have no paid staff, and our services are provided through the work of unpaid volunteers.