



# Protection & Advocacy Project

400 E. Broadway, Suite 409

Bismarck, ND 58501

701-328-2950

1-800-472-2670

TTY: 711

[www.ndpanda.org](http://www.ndpanda.org)



House Bill 1014 - January 14, 2025

## ND Protection and Advocacy Project - Workforce and Technology Project

### Testimony of Jordan Wetsel, P&A Project Coordinator

Greetings Chairman Nelson and Members of the House Appropriations - Human Resources Division Committee. My name is Jordan Wetsel, and I am the Project Coordinator for the Workforce and Technology Project with North Dakota Protection and Advocacy. P&A is an independent state agency established in 1977 to assert and advance the human, civil, and legal rights of people with disabilities. The agency's programs and services seek to make positive changes for people with disabilities where we live, learn, work, and play. P&A is committed to advancing assistive technology to support individuals with disabilities in achieving greater independence and improving their quality of life. It's been an honor to work with a dedicated team and partners to bring this important initiative to life. As I have experienced firsthand the tremendous impact and importance of North Dakota Protection and Advocacy in advancing the lives of those with disabilities in the state, I am writing testimony in support of HB 1014.

The Workforce and Technology Project empowers individuals with disabilities through access to technology that enhances independence. With your continued support, we can expand this impactful program, which has shown significant benefits to individuals and supports throughout North Dakota. These technologies help people to live more independently, manage daily tasks, and engage in their communities, while also reducing reliance on care that is costly and often times within institutional settings.

The cost of institutional care for one individual exceeds half a million dollars annually, while community-based services supported by assistive technology are significantly more cost-effective. For example, assistive technology solutions such as an automatic door opener (\$3,875) enable individuals to enter and exit their apartments independently. Accessible blinds (\$300) allow them to control their environment, and tools like Montessori knives (\$9.99) or a vegetable chopper (\$24.99) support independent cooking. Devices like a Ring doorbell (\$149.99) enhance security, smart light bulbs (as low as a few dollars) improve accessibility, and an Amazon Alexa (\$39.99) offers voice-controlled assistance for both environmental controls and other assistive technologies. These affordable, customizable tools are life changing. These minimal costs decrease the time that a caregiver needs to be present and available and are a fraction of the cost.


One helpful example is a pilot participant transitioning from the Life Skills and Transition Center (LSTC) to independent living in his own apartment required approximately \$1,250 in assistive technology. This included a Dose Health Flip for medication management (\$60/month) which enables him to independently dispense medication with notification to his support team to ensure administration completion. Additional tools such as a Brick to monitor safe internet use, furniture anchors, visual cues, and other adaptive technologies created a safe and empowering environment.

These examples illustrate the transformative power of assistive technology in promoting independence, reducing reliance on costly institutional care, and supporting individuals to thrive in their communities. In addition to its cost-saving potential, the technology and the access and funding for its use, fosters inclusion and independence, supporting North Dakota's efforts to help individuals live, work, and play in the least restrictive environment. This effort has also resulted in strong collaboration with partners like ND Assistive, the DD Council, Anne Carlsen, and the ND Department of Health and Human Services. Outcomes achieved also include updating Medicaid billing codes and state waivers, expanding assessments and access to assistive technology, along with continued education. This process has been successful by learning from other states like Ohio, Tennessee, Minnesota, and Washington, which have embraced technology to support individuals with disabilities.

Since its inception, the project has achieved significant milestones with positive outcomes. The pilot program and follow-up surveys have shown improvements in quality of life, independence, and autonomy for people, with overwhelmingly positive feedback from both individuals and their support networks.

This initiative is not just a program; it is a commitment to creating a society where individuals of all abilities can fully contribute. Funding for the Workforce and Technology Project is an investment in North Dakota's future, ensuring people with disabilities have the tools to thrive independently and with dignity. I urge you to support the continuation and expansion of this project, helping to reach even more individuals and make a lasting impact on North Dakotans.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to provide additional data, participant testimonials, or any other materials to further illustrate the impact of this initiative that seeks to make positive changes for people with disabilities where we live, learn, work, and play.



Jordan Wetsel,  
P&A Program Coordinator  
[jowetsel@nd.gov](mailto:jowetsel@nd.gov)  
(701) 328-3994