





 info@ndassistive.org

 800-895-4728

 www.ndassistive.org

Chairman Nelson and Members of the House Appropriations – Human Resources Division,

My name is Mike Chaussee, Executive Director for North Dakota Assistive the non-profit organization charged with administering the Assistive Technology Act program for the state. ND Assistive has been steadfast in its commitment to help residents thrive despite their limitations. Through numerous programs, we empower individuals to live independently, gain meaningful employment, succeed in school, and fully engage with their families and communities all by helping them discover what's possible through adoption of assistive technology (AT). I am writing to express our support for the proposed budget for Protection and Advocacy, which includes funding to enhance accessibility and understanding of AT in North Dakota.

While our organization excels at creating awareness and helping people discover the life-changing potential of AT, we recognize that we cannot accomplish this work alone. Even if we added dozens of additional employees, the demand for AT resources and support would far exceed our capacity. We need other organizations and agencies to help spread the word and collaborate to help integrate AT into the lives of North Dakotans. The reality is that limitations—whether related to hearing, vision, mobility, or cognition—are a natural part of aging and life. If we live long enough, we'll all benefit from AT at some point.

Expanding the reach of assistive technology can address several pressing challenges in our state.

- **Workforce Shortages:** Devices such as remote monitoring systems, alert systems, smart home technology, and medication management tools can alleviate workforce pressures. We appreciate that Protection and Advocacy is exploring a remote monitoring system, which enables individuals to live independently while reducing the demand on caregivers.
- **Caregiver Support:** Assistive technology eases the burden on both paid and unpaid caregivers. For instance, tools that help a person with Parkinson's eat independently or reminders that assist a child with autism in keeping appointments foster autonomy for the individual and reduce the caregiving load.
- **Cost Savings:** Although assistive technology may seem like an upfront expense, its long-term impact is substantial. Effective AT solutions can delay or eliminate the need for institutional care, saving families and the state thousands of dollars. We have examples of investments as small as \$200 delaying nursing home placements for years. A more recent example of cost savings associated with AT includes our collaboration with the Fargo Fire Department to use AT to reduce unnecessary 9-1-1 calls, benefiting both individuals and public resources.

Integrating AT into the lives of North Dakotans will require diverse strategies and the collaboration of multiple organizations, including ND Assistive, Protection and Advocacy, and dozens of others.

We appreciate the work that Protection and Advocacy has undertaken in advancing assistive technology and urge the state to recognize the impact and value it provides. By investing in these kinds of initiatives, we can build a more inclusive, efficient, and supportive community for all North Dakotans.

Mike Chaussee