



info@ndassistive.org



800-895-4728

www.ndassistive.org

Chairman Ruby and Members of the House Human Services Committee,

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 House Bill 1097 designed to study accessibility, focusing on people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have hearing differences.

We work with people every day looking for solutions to overcome the challenges they face. We find that most of the people we see want to be as independent as possible. They want to open their own doors, cook their own meals, feed themselves, communicate effectively, participate in community events, go to work, study with their classmates, or even go fishing with friends. Simply put, they don't want to have to rely on other people to do things they could do themselves with the right tools and systems in place.

House Bill 1097 provides an opportunity for the state of North Dakota to look deeply into the barriers it puts up, specifically for people who are hard of hearing or deaf, that block people from being as independent as possible. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), passed in 1990, specifically requires state and local governments to make sure people with disabilities are not excluded from participation in or denied benefits of service due to their disabilities. While architectural barriers are most often cited (accessible doorways or curb ramps for example), the law specifically cites communication barriers as well. This study specifically addresses that important component of ADA.

One of the big reasons we support this study is the opportunity it provides for state and local governments to reconnect with the ADA and take the lead in providing reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities. The study does not put an undue burden on any specific agency, city, township, or office. It, instead, creates an opportunity to discover the impact simple, cost effective, and person focused decisions can drive inclusion and participation for all.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important bill,

Mike Chaussee

Executive Director

North Dakota Assistive