

SIXTY-NINTH LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA

Testimony for House Bill 1164

My name is Kaytlyn Johnson, and I was born in Fargo, North Dakota. I proudly graduated from Fargo North High School in 2011. I am Deaf with a capital 'D' because I fully embrace my identity and culture, and American Sign Language (ASL) is my primary language.

The term "Hearing Impairment" does not define me because I am not broken. This outdated and harmful term focuses on limitations rather than celebrating the strengths, resilience, and contributions of Deaf individuals. It suggests that hearing is the standard and that anything different is flawed, damaged, or in need of fixing. This perception is offensive and damaging. The Deaf community overwhelmingly rejects this term because it does not reflect who we are or the pride we have in our identity.

When someone calls me "hearing impaired," I do not stay silent. I confront this harmful label by challenging their word choice and urging them to say "Deaf." I ask them directly: "Why did you choose the term 'hearing impairment'? Do you believe I am broken?" This question forces them to reflect on the weight of their words and the biases they carry. Words matter. Language shapes perceptions, and using outdated, negative terminology continues to marginalize people like me.

Adopting the term "Deaf and Hard of Hearing" is more than a simple language change - it is a bold and necessary step toward respect, dignity, and true inclusion. This terminology empowers us and recognizes our full humanity, valuing us for our strengths and contributions, not for perceived deficits.

I wholeheartedly support the terminology updates proposed in House Bill 1164 and passionately urge you to pass this critical bill. By doing so, you affirm the importance of inclusive and empowering language for all North Dakotans.

Thank you sincerely for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,
Kaytlyn Johnson