

January 13, 2025

Members of the Legislative Assembly:

My name is Bambi Lambert, a teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing for the Fargo Public Schools. Not only am I a teacher of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing, I am the hearing daughter of parents who are Deaf who are alumni of the North Dakota School for the Deaf. My involvement in the Deaf community has been lifelong, including my instructional role of teaching Deaf/Hard of Hearing students in the State of North Dakota since 2003 and previous collaboration through service of Office of Special Education Program initiatives PEPNET and National Deaf Center on Post Secondary Outcomes.

I am writing in support of HB1164. For far too long, the State of North Dakota has used the term “hearing impaired” to define individuals who do not have equitable auditory access and quite possibly use another mode of communication such as American Sign Language. Many other states abandoned this terminology years ago, replacing the term with Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH).

Having served on the North Dakota’s PEPNET and National Deaf Center teams as an OSEP directive, we have worked hard to remove barriers and create students into employees. I am proud to say that in North Dakota we have graduated individuals who have transitioned onto post-secondary training with 66.4% having some college training, 17.1% completing a bachelor’s degree and 5% a master’s degree. According to the National Deaf Center, North Dakota residents with hearing loss are 74% employed (vs. the national average of 53.3%). Clearly, in North Dakota, these individuals are not impaired.

When I explain the term hearing impaired to my students, they often cringe or feel insulted. They are bothered by the term because it infers that they are limited. I remind them that they are not limited. They can accomplish anything they want to; it may just be in a different way. Now, more than ever, our students have more opportunities to accomplish their goals. Technology has opened doors for communication. While technology is great, these students are also isolated, making them feel as they are alone in the world as they are often the sole student with hearing loss in their schools. They don’t need another negative term (impaired) to make them feel oppressed.

I ask that this Legislative Assembly do what is right and update the terminology from Hearing Impaired to Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Sincerely,

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Bloom, C. L., Palmer, J.L., & Winninghoff, J. (2024). Postsecondary Achievement of Deaf People in North Dakota: 2022. National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes, The University of Texas at Austin. www.nationaldeafcenter.org