

January 13, 2025

Dear Legislators,

I am writing to express support for changing the terminology of the special education categories in North Dakota from "Emotional Disturbance" to "Emotional Disability" and from "Hearing Impairment, including deafness" to "Deaf or Hard of Hearing." These changes are essential to better align with respectful language that accurately reflects the challenges and experiences of students affected by these disability areas.

The term "emotional disturbance" has long carried a negative connotation that can perpetuate stigma, misunderstanding, and even shame for students and their families. Similarly, the term "hearing impairment" can be perceived as outdated and less respectful. Labeling these categories as "Emotional Disability" and "Deaf or Hard of Hearing" would promote a more respectful and supportive educational environment that fosters inclusion and understanding.

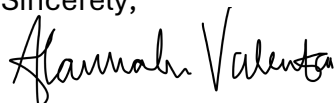
Personally, I have had the privilege of fostering children who have received special education services under the disability category of "Emotional Disturbance." Witnessing their struggles and triumphs has given me a deep appreciation for the importance of language in shaping their experiences. Not only does it impact their belief in themselves, but it can also inadvertently hinder progress. By updating this terminology to "Emotional Disability," we can help create a more empathetic and empowering environment for these students, encouraging them to focus on their strengths and growth.

Additionally, in my role as a School Psychologist, I have worked closely with students, families, and educators to determine eligibility for special education services and navigate resources. I have seen firsthand how the language used in these processes can influence the perceptions and attitudes of everyone involved. "Emotional Disability" better reflects the nature of these students' challenges, fostering a supportive atmosphere that emphasizes their potential and well-being.

Likewise, adopting "Deaf or Hard of Hearing" as the preferred terminology will foster a more inclusive and respectful environment for students with hearing challenges. This updated language acknowledges the cultural identity of the community and promotes a more supportive environment.

Thank you for considering these important changes. I am confident that these adjustments in language will foster a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for all students.

Sincerely,



Alannah Valenta

School Psychologist and Mother