

TESTIMONY ON HB 1049
SENATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
February 20, 2025
By: Michelle Woodcock, Special Education Regional Coordinator
Office of Specially Designed Services
701-328-2633
North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

Chairman Wobbema and Members of the Committee:

My name is Michelle Woodcock, and I am a Regional Coordinator in the Office of Specially Designed Services with the Department of Public Instruction. I am here to speak in favor of HB 1049 with recommended amendments.

Approximately 79% of speech-language pathologists work within schools in the United States (www.bls.gov). The shortage of trained speech-language pathologists in North Dakota is well documented. The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction has tried many creative strategies to address this shortage in schools. In 2004, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, in collaboration with the faculty of the Communication Sciences and Disorders Department of Minot State University and special education unit directors from across the state, launched the associate degree in speech-language pathology paraprofessional program. For the past 21 years, Lake Region State College has delivered the speech-language pathology paraprofessional program. The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction issues the SLPP Certificate to verify

candidates who have met the requirements of this program or an equivalent program and are prepared to work in North Dakota schools. The NDDPI Office of Specially Designed Services has issued 251 certificates to date.

With HB 1049 and the Board of Examiners on Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology adding a two-year degree in speech-language pathology assistants' program to qualify for a speech-language pathology assistants license, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction would like to ask for an amendment to the bill to grandfather certificates issued by the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction to speech-language pathology paraprofessionals from 2004 to 2026. Lake Region State College's program of study and the coursework laid out in this program for a two-year institution are very similar. Allowing the grandfathering of these students from the inception of this program to the present day would allow students at Lake Region State College to receive the licenses as well as allow Lake Region State College time to make any program updates to satisfy this bill's requirement. This amendment would allow the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction to allow the board to administer all licensure in the state for clinical or school-based speech-language pathology licensed assistants.

Chairman Wobbema and Members of the Committee, that concludes my prepared testimony and I will stand for any questions that you may have.