

Support updates to Commission board membership statutes

[SF4478](#) (Hoffman)/ [HF4528](#) (Hicks)

Update [MS 256C.28](#) to better align with qualifications needed to serve on the board for the Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind & Hard of Hearing

The Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind & Hard of Hearing, overseen by a governor-appointed board, develops and advocates for public policies for and with the 20% of Minnesotans who have hearing loss.

With this legislation, the Commission aims to:

- As required by statute, fill at least 50% of its voting seats with qualified candidates who have the lived experiences of the deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing Minnesotans we serve.
- More efficiently convey to state policymakers and administrators the information necessary to make decisions that will protect and promote quality of life for all Minnesotans.
- Maintain a balance of experienced and new members by bringing back experienced members as needed.

Key points

1. **Remove outdated requirements that work against the goal of 50% voting representation.**
 - a. **Parent.** At times, the governor's office has interpreted "a parent of a deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing child" as requiring one parent for each type of child, for a total of three seats. 90% of deaf and deafblind children, however, are born to hearing parents. The update would ensure at least one parent or guardian is represented but free up two more seats to contribute towards the 50% goal.
 - b. **Human services representatives.** Decades ago, deaf and hard of hearing people often pursued careers in human services due to discrimination in other fields. Today, with more career options being available, this requirement for representatives of county and regional human services presents yet another barrier to the 50% representation goal.
 - c. **Advisory Committee positions.** Eight seats are currently set aside for representatives of regional advisory committees managed by DHS's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division (DHHS). Due to low participation, however, DHHS is exploring consolidating these committees. Capping the number of advisory committee seats at five frees up more at-large seats to ensure the 50% representation threshold is met.
2. **Add ex officio positions to strengthen connections with state agencies serving deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing Minnesotans.** This is in line with the practices of other state councils.
3. **Create flexibility in total time served to ensure a balance of experienced and new members.** While the limit on consecutive terms would remain in place (four-year terms, no more than three consecutive terms), removing the overall total of 12 years would enable the Commission to keep the 15 seats filled and provide new members with access to institutional knowledge and potential mentors.