

## **John Fechter**

Board Vice Chair, Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind & Hard of Hearing

### **Testimony in support of SF4478**

Senate Human Services Hearing

Vice Chair: Senate Omar Fateh

Monday, March 11, 2024, 3:00 pm

Minnesota Senate Building, Room 1200

Good afternoon, Chair Fateh and Members of the Committee

My name is John Fechter. I am the board vice chair for the Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing.

I am seeking your support on **SF4478** to better align MS 256C.28 with the qualifications needed to serve on the board for the Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing.

Over the past few decades, the demographics of potential board candidates have changed. The current statutes include outdated requirements that make it difficult to ensure that our board is diverse and representative of the populations we serve. As a result, some seats remain vacant.

The Board's goal is to ensure 50% of the voting membership has a hearing loss and represents our diverse communities. Currently 8 seats are reserved for representatives of regional advisory committees managed by DHS's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division (DHHSD). We are left with seven seats to fill with the governor's appointees.

In recent years, DHHS has struggled to fill those eight advisory committee seats and is currently exploring consolidating the regions into fewer advisory committees. We seek to cap the number of advisory committee seats at five and increase the number of at-large governor appointees to 10.

Another challenge is that the governor's office has at times interpreted the statutes as requiring a minimum of three parents of deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing children. I am a Deaf parent of Deaf children, but there are not many like me. 90% of deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing children are born into families that can hear, which means parents are usually not themselves deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing. This update will ensure that at least one parent is appointed and allow more flexibility to satisfy the 50% representation threshold.

Again, we are asking for flexibility in the current language to allow us to bring exceptional people to our board to address the current trends our communities face. Please support SF4478.

Thank you.