Written Testimony in Support of SF1101 – Coverage for Augmentative and Alternative Communication Systems

Dear Members of the Commerce Committee
Parent testimonial for SF1101

We are the proud parents of a 9-year-old son who is nonspeaking* and relies on an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device as his primary means of communication. Our son is bright, curious, and funny, but without his device, most people would never know, and many would make incorrect assumptions about his cognitive ability.

The SF1101 bill matters because it recognizes that AAC systems and the services needed to use them are medically necessary. These devices are not toys, perks, or "free iPads." They are critical medical tools that allow children like my son to ask questions, communicate pain, describe symptoms, make choices, build relationships, and participate in their own care.

Our son was born with medical complexity and a rare genetic condition. He uses a wheelchair, is tube-fed, wears hearing aids, and receives care from more than twenty specialists across several healthcare systems. Because of significant joint contractures in his jaw, hands, and elbows, he cannot reliably use speech or sign language. His AAC device is the only way he can clearly express his thoughts, needs, and personality.

When he has his device, he participates in his typical, integrated 3rd-grade class at Glen Lake Elementary, builds friendships, and advocates for himself. **Recently a classmate asked his mom, not him, "How does he know how to use that thing?" Our son immediately typed back on his device: "Because I am smart."**

Just the other day, while preparing for an appointment with his spinal surgeon, he was able to ask clarifying questions about what to expect. **He thought he was going to have surgery that day when it was actually just a check-in**. Because he could communicate, he was able to express his confusion and anxiety, and we could reassure him and prevent unnecessary stress.

AAC users represent a small portion of Minnesotans, meaning **the cost impact to insurers is minimal. But for families like mine, the impact is life-changing.** When my son can communicate, everything improves, his health, education, independence, and dignity.

Families like ours already navigate many barriers in the healthcare system. Communication should not be one of them. SF1101 helps ensure Minnesotans with complex communication needs are not silenced by insurance policy. **For my son and others like him, access to AAC is the difference between being spoken about, and actually being heard and understood.**

Sincerely,
Haley and Tim Brunelle
Parents of #FelixNeptune, a proud AAC user

** ”Nonspeaking” refers to individuals who do not use verbal speech but often communicate through AAC devices, sign language, or typing, emphasizing that they have language and thoughts. "Nonverbal" traditionally implies a total lack of spoken language, which can inaccurately suggest a lack of cognition or comprehension.*