Advocacy Toolkit

A guide to creating your story and advocating for change in North Dakota.

Revised Sept 21, 2026

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Cass County



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Share
Your Story

Personal stories have the power to inspire, educate, and create change. By sharing your experience, you can help others see the possibilities and build a more inclusive community.

AMPLIFY AWARENESS

Your story helps others understand real-life experiences.

INSPIRE OTHERS

Your journey can give hope and encouragement to others facing similar challenges.

CREATE CHANGE

Personal stories drive understanding, influence attitudes, and help shape policies and programs.

Whether it's in your own words, a photo, or a short video, your story makes a difference.

SHARE TODAY!

Your voice. Your story. Our stronger future. Help us build a community where everyone belongs and thrives.

arccassnd.org

How to Create Your Story

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Use these steps to explain who you are, what issue matters to you, and why change is needed.

1. Introduction

When writing or sharing an introduction to your personal story, include information about yourself that you might share when meeting someone for the first time.

INCLUDE:

- Your name
- Where you live (city or district)
- What has happened in your life (past and present)
- Important people in your life

EXAMPLE

Hi my name is Joe and I live in Fargo, ND. I have a disability. I live with my mom, dad, and cat Ernie. I like to be involved in my community and want to start volunteering at a local animal shelter.

2. Issue or Problem

Think about a problem or policy that affects you or someone you care about.
Help elected officials understand how the issue impacts:

- The supports you depend upon
- Your health or financial stability
- Inclusion in the community
- Your quality of life

EXAMPLE

Right now, I am concerned about transportation. I do not have a driver's license so I have to depend on the city bus system to stay involved in my community. The city buses in town only run at certain times and routes. There are very few routes available for people in my community, limiting our access to building community, employment, and living a quality life.

3. Solution and “the Ask”

Your story should always include an "ask". This can be an idea or solutions that can help.

IDEAS:

- What things would have made your life better
- What you want to see happen next
- What you want ot happen for other people who have lives like you

EXAMPLE

I'm asking you to support policies that increase accessible transportation options for people with disabilities. By supporting these policies, you will help many North Dakotans with disabilities gain better access to their community and become more independent.

4. Closing and “Thank You”

Whenever you share your story with an elected official, be sure to thank them for taking the time to read your letter or meet with you. It is important for them to know that we appreciate the work they do!

EXAMPLE

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. I really appreciate all the work you do. I am counting on you to support policies that increase accessible transportation options for people with disabilities.

Pro-tip: Find policy and advocacy materials at thearc.org/resource/storytelling-toolkit-for-advocates/

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Plan Your Story

Fill out this form to create your personal story

LET ME TELL YOU A LITTLE BIT ABOUT MYSELF...

I AM EXPERIENCING A CHALLENGE, PROBLEM, OR CONCERN THAT IMPACTS MY QUALITY OF LIFE. THIS ISSUE IS...

YOU CAN HELP SOLVE THIS ISSUE BY...

IN CLOSING, I WOULD LIKE TO THANK...

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When & How to Contact Your Legislator

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Knowing when and how to engage with your legislator can make your advocacy more effective. Here are key moments and methods to consider.

Best times to reach out

- **During a legislative session:** Lawmakers are actively considering bills, making this a key time to reach out.
- **Before key votes:** Timing your message before a vote can influence their decision.
- **When a bill is introduced:** Early engagement helps shape the conversation.

Ways to make contact

- **Face to face meetings:** The most impactful way to build relationships.
- **Phone calls:** A quick and effective way to express your support or concerns.
- **Emails:** Ideal for sharing detailed information and resources.
- **Letters:** A personal, tangible way to make your voice stand out and leave an impression.

Pro Tip

Build relationships year-round, not just when you need something. Legislator appreciate hearing from engaged constituents consistently.

Find your Legislator

Use the following resources to find and contact your elected officials:

NDLEGISLATIVE BRANCH

www.legisnd.gov

Identify Your Legislator

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Finding the right legislator is the first step to contacting the people who represent you.

1. Head to ndlegis.gov, and enter your zip code at the top right.

2. On the next screen, click on the icon next to your address to see your district and your lawmakers. You can click on their photos to learn more about them.

69TH LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY - REGULAR SESSION (2025)



Senator
Katly Hogan
District 21 D



Representative
LaurelBeth Hager
District 21 D

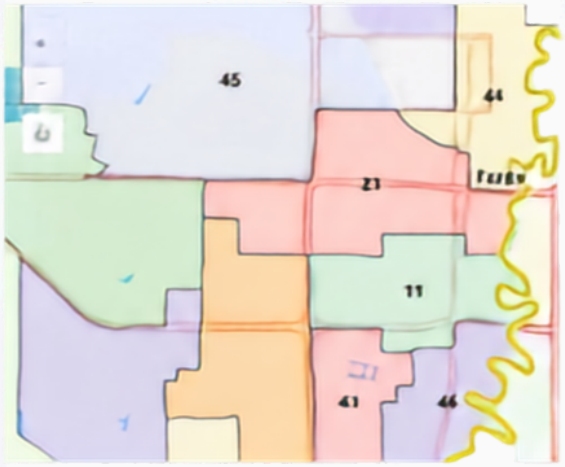


Representative
Mary Schneider
District 21 D

69TH LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY - SPECIAL SESSION (JAN 2026)

69TH LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY - 99SPECIAL SESSION (SEP 2026)

Interactive Map | Population Statistics



City of Fargo | County of Cass
View larger, attractive map
District 21 Map

123 Anywhere St., Any City, State, USA 12345

3. Click on your legislator's profile to learn more about them, and to access their contact information.

TIP: Your legislators represent you in the North Dakota Senate or House of Representatives. Find yours—and save their contact info!

My Legislative Profile

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The number of my Legislative District is _____.

My Senator's name and contact info:

1) _____ _____

_____

Senator _____ serves on the following committee(s):

A) _____ which meets in the _____ room on these days of the week: _____.

B) _____ which meets in the _____ room on these days of the week: _____.

My Representatives' names and contact info :

1) _____ _____

2) _____ _____

Representative _____ serves on the following committee(s):

A) _____ which meets in the _____ room on these days of the week: _____.

B) _____ which meets in the _____ room on these days of the week: _____.

Representative _____ serves on the following committee(s):

A) _____ which meets in the _____ room on these days of the week: _____.

B) _____ which meets in the _____ room on these days of the week: _____.

Meeting with Elected Officials

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1 Schedule the Meeting



- Contact by phone or email to set up a time to meet with your elected official.
- You can offer some dates and times that work for you, but be flexible and work with their schedule too if possible.
- Some meetings may have to be virtual, while others might have an in-person option. You should request whichever option works best for you.

2 Practice Before Meeting



- Tell your story to someone you trust.
- Keep your story to 3 minutes. Have someone time you.
- Practicing your story before the meeting goes a long way towards helping you feel prepared and confident.

3 Tips During Meeting



- Be confident about sharing your story and your experience!
- Remember to greet your elected official by their title of Senator or Representative.
- When introducing yourself, let them know that you are someone who lives in their district and that you're a constituent.
- Briefly share an issue or problem you'd like to discuss.
- If an elected official asks a question that you can't answer, don't worry! After the meeting, you can research, connect with an advocacy organization for help, and then follow up with more information.
- Keep in mind the importance of building positive relationships with our elected officials even if we disagree on an issue.
- Thank the legislator at the end of the meeting. It is important for elected officials to know that we appreciate their time and work.

4 Keep Notes About



- What happened in the visit
- The elected official you met with
- The issues discussed
- Any comments that the elected official made

Phone and email examples

Not sure where to start?

Below are some templates you can use to schedule an appointment to meet with your legislator. Please don't forget to revise and personalize to meet your specific needs.

Email template

Dear ____,

My name is <first name, last name> and I am your constituent. I am emailing you to schedule an appointment. I would love to briefly discuss with you issues that are important to North Dakotans with disabilities and their families. I am open to meeting via video conference (e.g., Zoom) or in-person.

Thank you in advance for your response.

Sincerely,

<Your name>
<Your home address>
<Your phone number>

Phone script

Hello, My name is <first name, last name> and I am a constituent. I am calling to schedule an appointment. I would love to briefly discuss issues that are important to North Dakotans with disabilities and their families. I am open to meeting via video conference (e.g., Zoom) or in-person.

After the meeting: Thanking your legislator

Whenever you have the opportunity to meet with your legislator or their staff, you should follow that contact with a thank-you note. The best thank-you notes remind the legislator about who you are, how your issue is important to his/her constituents and reiterate your "ask". Remember, this is another opportunity to advocate for your issue.

If possible, send the handwritten thank you card within a day or two of your visit.

Use the template to the right as a guide.

Include a general reminder about the issues that were discussed during the meeting

Answer any questions you didn't have answers to at the meeting.

[DATE]

Dear [Legislator's Name],

Thank you for meeting with me on [DATE]. I appreciate your time and interest in learning about and discussing issues affecting North Dakotans with disabilities. I enjoyed meeting with you, and I hope you will consider supporting community-based services.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need further information.

Sincerely,
[SIGNATURE]
«Your phone number and/or email address»

Where do I mail my thank you note?

The Honorable [First Name]
[Last Name]
North Dakota State Capitol
600 East Boulevard Ave.
Bismarck, ND 58505

How to Track a Bill in the North Dakota Legislature

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Follow these simple steps to stay informed and make an impact.

1

Find the bill

Use “Find a Bill” on ndlegis.gov in the top right corner of the page

2

Explore the bill page

Review the overview, versions, actions, hearings, testimony, and video.

3

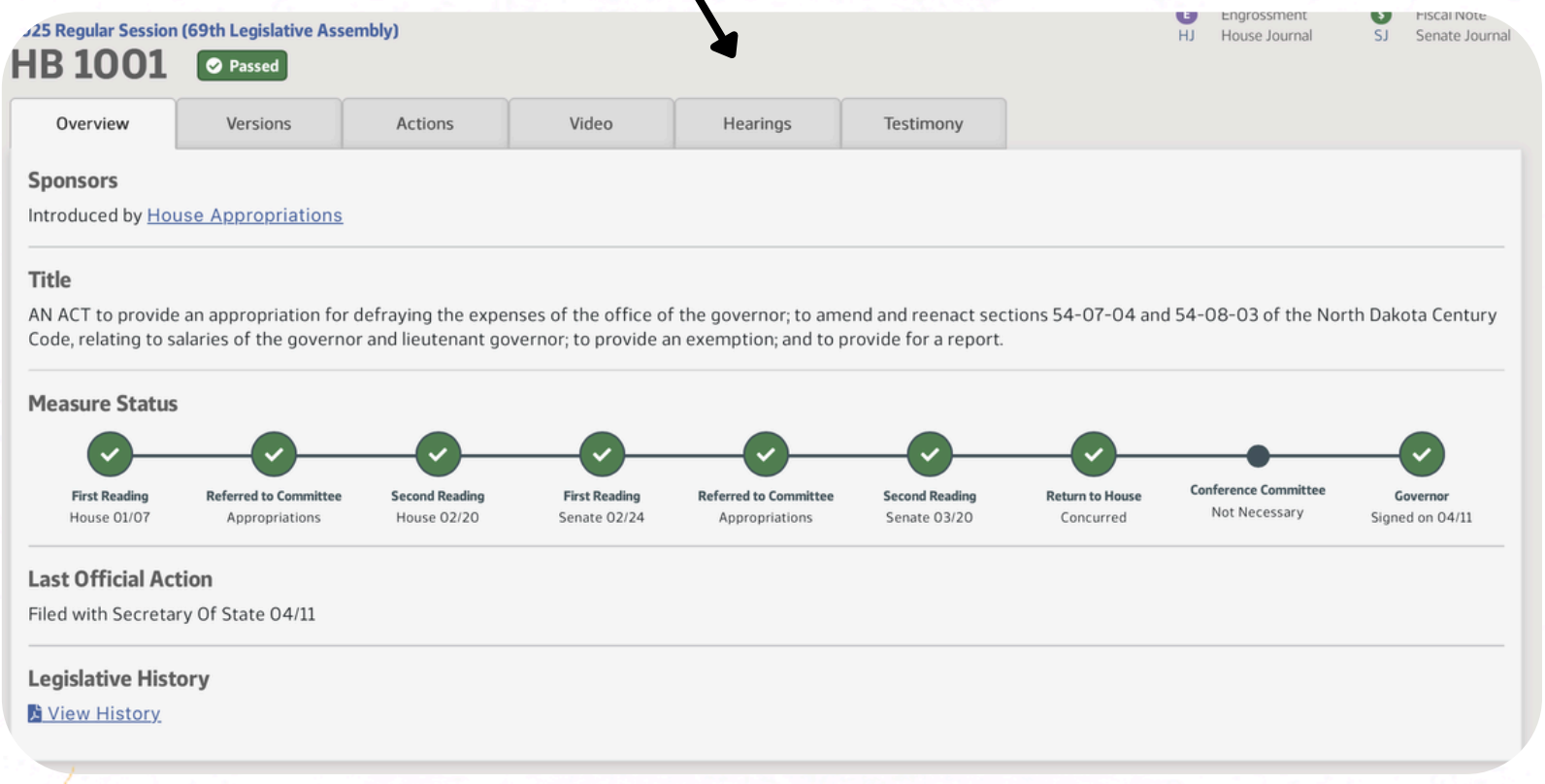
Watch the hearing schedule

Check the committee, date, time, and room.

4

Track it your way

Save bills in the free Legislative Bill Tracking System.



PRO-TIP:

Subscribe to Protection & Advocacy's News and Updates to receive updates on disability-related legislation throughout the session: ndpanda.org/resources/legislative-action

Testifying at a Hearing

Public hearings are generally held after a bill is assigned to a legislative committee. Your testimony is important in influencing legislator's decision on bills. Here is how to prepare, submit, and deliver effective testimony at a North Dakota legislative hearing.

BEFORE THE HEARING

- Confirm the bill number, current bill version, committee, date, time, and room.
- Use the "Submit Testimony" link on the Legislature's website by the hearing-specific deadline.
- Include your contact information, select the agenda item, and indicate support, oppose, or neutral.
- Upload written testimony. Written testimony is valuable even if you do not speak in person.

AT THE HEARING

- Arrive at the beginning and sign the attendance sheet with your name, bill number, and position.
- Wait for the chair to call testimony. Once the chair closes the hearing on a bill, additional testimony is usually not accepted.
- Everyone usually gets a chance to speak, but sometimes, because of large turnouts, it is not possible for each individual to speak. If you are not called to speak, the committee may still acknowledge your presence, and you may be asked if you favor or oppose the bill.
- Begin: "Mr. or Madam Chair and members of the committee, my name is [name], and I am from [city]. I support/oppose [bill number] because..."
- State your position clearly, share the most relevant personal experience or facts.
- End with a clear request such as "do pass" or "do not pass."

AFTER THE HEARING

- Committee votes may happen immediately, later, or at another meeting.
- Check the committee clerk, your legislator, the ND Legislative Branch website, or the Legislative Information Kiosk for the committee's action.

TIP
Written testimony is always valuable. Even if you cannot attend or are not called to speak, submitting written testimony ensures your position is part of the official record.

Engaging with Media: Letters to the Editor



A letter to the editor is a short opinion article sent to a newspaper by a reader. You can use it to teach your community, share your opinion, or explain how an issue affected you. Writing a letter is a good way to bring attention to an issue, especially during the legislative session.

Tips for writing your letter



1. Keep it short

Write 250 words or less. People are more likely to read your letter. Check the newspaper's website for its rules before send your letter.



2. Create a strong first sentence

Start with a strong hook—a compelling fact, personal experience, question, or bold statement that immediately grabs the reader's attention and makes them want to keep reading.



3. Make it personal

Share how the issue affects you or your community—your lived experience makes your argument more relatable, credible, and memorable.



4. Use facts you know

Share your experience, knowledge, or facts about the issue or your community. Facts can make your letter more convincing.



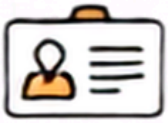
5. Use plain language

Use simple words and short sentences. Imagine you are explaining the issue to someone who has never heard about it before. Avoid ALL CAPS or bold text--this can make it look like you are shouting.



6. Ask people to take action

End with a clear call to action that tells readers what they can do next, because a strong letter should not just explain a problem—it should motivate people to act.



7. Submit your letter

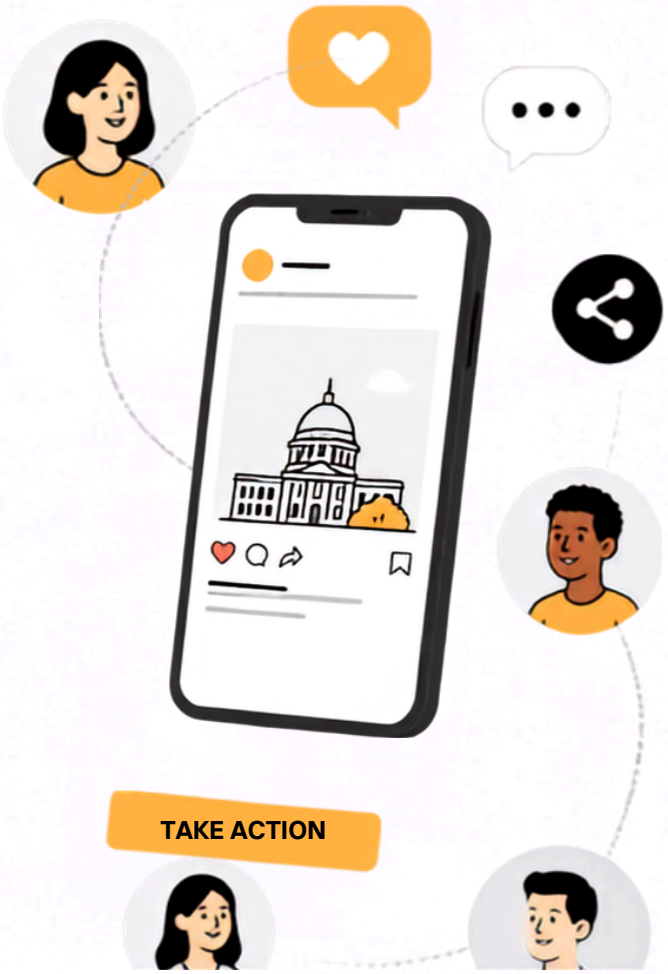
Find the newspaper editor's email or contact form for submitting your letter. Don't worry about making up a catchy subject line or title—the newspaper will write one based on your letter. Send your letter in the body of the email, not as an attachment.

Advocacy on Social Media

Social media can support advocacy and coalition building. Here's how to use it effectively and responsibly:

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- **Make it easy to share: A short, clear message with a strong takeaway is more likely to be passed along.**
- **Tell your story in your own words, and stay on topic.**
- **Use photos, short videos, graphics, and captions to make your message easy to understand**
- **Tag partners and invite organizations, families, and community members to join the conversation**
- **Build relationships by listening, responding, and amplifying other voices**
- **Use a clear call to action: contact a legislator, attend a hearing, or share a resource.**
- **Protect privacy and get permission before posting someone else's story or image.**
- **Keep showing up: Advocacy is more effective when you build sustained attention rather than posting only once.**



Be mindful of bots and bad-faith commenters—don't waste your energy arguing with people who aren't genuinely interested in having a constructive conversation.

Creating powerful video content

1. **Lead with one clear message.**
   Start with something that makes people want to keep watching. Focus on one issue, one story, and one takeaway.
2. **Write a simple script.**
   A few bullet points or a short script can help you stay focused and confident.
3. **Keep it short.**
   Say what matters most and cut anything that doesn't serve your message.
4. **Don't forget the ask!**
   Tell viewers what you want them to do next: contact a legislator, learn more, share your story, or support a specific change.
5. **Prioritize good audio.**
   You don't need expensive equipment, but people need to be able to hear you clearly. Test your audio before recording the full video.
6. **Pay attention to lighting and background.**
   Face a light source when possible, avoid distracting backgrounds, and make sure you're easy to see.
7. **Make it accessible.**
   Add captions, speak clearly, use large and readable text, and describe important visual information.
8. **Choose a strong thumbnail.**
   Use a clear image and a few large, readable words that tell viewers what the video is about.
9. **Share strategically.**
   Choose platforms where your audience is active. Add a brief description, relevant hashtags, and a link or resource where people can learn more or take action.

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Your story can inform, connect, and create change.
Press record. Share your voice. Make an impact.

You Have a Voice. Use It.

Advocacy can feel overwhelming, but it doesn't need to be! Advocacy is just telling people what you want or how you feel about something.

Sometimes the problems are big and change doesn't happen overnight. You do not have to fix everything to make a difference. You have your story, your lived experience, your voice, and the ability to connect with others. You now have tools for contacting lawmakers, sharing your story, testifying, speaking up at local meetings, and bringing others into the fight.

Change happens when ordinary people decide their voice matters—and keep showing up.

North Dakota needs people like you at the table. You have the tools. You have a voice. And you have a role in shaping what comes next.

Keep showing up.



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Resources

These organizations and websites can help you learn about the legislative process, prepare testimony, understand your rights, and connect with advocacy support.

ALL Advocates Leading Their Lives
facebook.com/advocatesleadingtheirlives
A statewide self-advocacy network run by and for people with disabilities, supporting equal rights, choice, independence, and self-advocacy.

North Dakota Legislative Branch
ndlegis.gov
Find legislators, bills, committee schedules, livestreams, and hearing information.

Submit Written or Oral Testimony
ndlegis.gov/written-and-oral-testimony-submission
Official instructions for registering to submit written testimony or give oral testimony in person or remotely.

North Dakota Protection & Advocacy Project (Disability Rights North Dakota)
ndpanda.org
Free statewide disability-rights information, self-advocacy help, legal advocacy, trainings, and legislative advocacy support.

Family Voices of ND
fvnd.org
A family-led health information and education center helping families of children and youth with special health care needs or disabilities.

League of Women Voters of the Red River Valley
lwvnd.org/rrv
Nonpartisan voter education, civic engagement, and local advocacy opportunities.

Freedom Resource Center for Independent Living
freedomrc.org
Disability services including peer mentoring, independent-living skills, advocacy, accessibility information, and resource referrals.

The Arc of Cass County
arccassnd.org
Local face-to-face advocacy and help.

North Dakota State Council on Developmental Disabilities
nd.gov/scdd
Works to empower individuals with developmental disabilities to live independent, self-determined, and included lives within their communities

Aging and Disability Resource Link of North Dakota
ndcarechoice.hhs.nd.gov
Search for statewide resources such as housing, transportation, caregiving, disability services, legal help, and financial assistance.

ND Federation of Families
ndffcmh.org
A parent-run organization providing support, advocacy, and education for children and youth with emotional, behavioral, or mental health needs and their families.

ND Ombudsman
hhs.nd.gov/adults-and-aging/human-services/adults-and-aging/long-term-care-ombudsman-program
Advocates for people living in long-term care settings, helps resolve concerns, and provides information about resident rights and care options.

North Dakota Boards & Commissions for Disability Advocates (2026)

There are several statewide boards focused on disability and human services—and they need people with lived experience and a passion for advocacy. Consider applying to serve on a board and use your voice to help shape policy, recommendations, and legislative priorities across North Dakota.

Statewide Boards

These directly shape disability policy, funding, rights, and services.

- **State Council on Developmental Disabilities** — statewide systems change, advocacy, leadership development.
- **Human Service Zone Boards** — oversee local disability services, HCBS, case management.
- **Behavioral Health Planning Council** — mental health, addiction, co-occurring needs.
- **State Independent Living Council (SILC)** — community inclusion, IL services, advocacy.

Health, Long-Term Care & Safety

Boards that influence healthcare access, long-term supports, and rights.

- **Medical Advisory Committee** — Medicaid, public health, disability-related health policy.
- **Addiction Counseling Examiners** — behavioral health workforce and access.
- **Marriage & Family Therapy Licensure Board** — mental health access for families.
- **Emergency Preparedness Advisory Groups** — ensures emergency plans include disability needs.

Education, Children & Families

Boards that shape early intervention, special education, and family supports.

- **Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council** — birth-to-three services, early intervention.
- **Special Education Advisory Committees** — K-12 special education policy.

North Dakota Boards & Commissions for Disability Advocates (2026)

Justice, Rights & Civil Liberties

Boards that influence disability justice and rights protections.

- **Interstate Juvenile Supervision Council** — supports youth with disabilities in the justice system.
- **Interstate Adult Offender Supervision Council** — disability justice and re-entry supports.
- **Guardianship & Conservatorship Committee** — supported decision-making, rights protection.

Housing, Transportation & Community Access

Boards that influence accessibility, rural inclusion, and infrastructure.

- **Housing Finance Agency Advisory Groups** — accessible housing, homelessless prevention.
- **Transit Advisory Committees** — paratransit, rural transportation access.
- **Architecture & Engineering Boards** — ADA compliance in public spaces.

Workforce, Employment & Economic Opportunity

Boards that influence employment access and workforce policy.

- **Workforce Safety & Insurance Committees** — workplace accommodations, return-to-work supports.
- **Vocational Rehabilitation Advisory Groups** — employment supports for people with disabilities.

Advocacy Coalitions (Not State Boards, but Highly Influential)

- **North Dakota Disabilities Advocacy Consortium (NDDAC)** — statewide disability policy coalition.

Testimony Example A

<Date>

Chair and members of the committee,

My name is Sarah, and I live in Fargo. I'm here today because I want to talk about why people with disabilities need access to reliable transportation.

I use public transportation to get to work, appointments, and things I want to do in my community. When transportation isn't available or reliable, I have fewer choices. Sometimes I have to ask other people for help, and sometimes I have to miss out altogether.

I know transportation might not seem like a big issue to everyone, but for people like me, it can mean the difference between being independent and having to rely on someone else.

I'm asking you to support funding and policies that make transportation more accessible and reliable for people with disabilities across North Dakota.

Thank you for listening to people with disabilities when you make decisions that affect our lives.

<Your name>
<Your home address>
<Your phone number>

Testimony Example B

<Date>

Chair and members of the committee,

My name is Jordan, and I live in Fargo. I am a self-advocate, and I'm here today because finding affordable housing is really hard.

I want to live in my own home and be as independent as I can. But there aren't enough affordable places for people like me. Sometimes housing waiting lists are so long that they close before you can even get on them.

When you can't find a place you can afford, you don't have many choices. You might have to stay with family, live somewhere that isn't right for you, or worry about losing your housing.

People with disabilities deserve to have a safe, affordable place to call home. I'm asking you to invest in more affordable and accessible housing and make sure people aren't shut out of housing programs simply because the waiting lists are full.

Everyone needs a place to call home. People with disabilities shouldn't have to wait indefinitely for one. Thank you for your time.

<Your name>
<Your home address>
<Your phone number>

Words to Know

These common terms can help you understand how the state legislature works and how to participate in the process.

Bill: A proposed law introduced in the legislature.

Legislator: An elected official who serves in the state legislature.

Senator: An elected member of the state senate.

Representative: An elected member of the state house of representatives.

Session: The period when the legislature meets to introduce, debate, and vote on legislation.

Committee: A smaller group of lawmakers that studies bills and holds hearings.

Committee hearing: A public meeting where testimony and information about a bill are presented.

Testimony: A statement given to lawmakers to explain a position, experience, or concern.

Sponsor: A legislator who introduces or supports a bill.

Amendment: A proposed change to the wording of a bill.

Vote: A decision made by lawmakers for or against a bill or motion.

Majority: More than half of the votes.

Quorum: The minimum number of members needed to conduct official business.

Constituent: A person who lives in an elected official's district.

District: The geographic area represented by an elected official.

Advocacy: Actions taken to explain an issue and what is important to you

Veto: An action by the governor or executive branch rejecting a bill.

Enacted law: A bill that has completed the legislative process and become law.

Notes