

Testimony
House Bill 1135 - Department of Human Services
House Human Services
Representative Robin Weisz, Chairman
January 9, 2017

Chairman Weisz, and members of the House Human Services Committee, I am Russ Cusack, Director of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Division for the Department of Human Services (Department). I am here today to support House Bill 1135, which was introduced at the request of the Department.

House Bill 1135 relates to consolidating the committee on employment of people with disabilities (Committee) into the state rehabilitation council (SRC), renaming the employment of disabilities fund to allow the SRC to access the funds, and "updating the categories of positions in the state service." This efficiency will serve to expand employment opportunities for people of all ages with disabilities by identifying and reducing barriers to competitive and integrated employment for persons with disabilities.

Senate Bill 2271 enacted during the 2013 legislative assembly, amended and reenacted subsection 5 of section 39-01-15 and section 50-06.1-16 of the North Dakota Century Code, related to the Committee. The 2013 bill expanded the membership of the Committee to advance competitive and integrated employment as the first employment option for persons with disabilities.

The SRC is a Governor-appointed council, mandated since 1992 by federal regulation for a state to receive federal VR funds. The SRC is a group of North Dakota residents, more than 50% of the membership are persons with disabilities, who are appointed by the Governor to advise the VR agency on issues related to the competitive and integrated

employment of persons with disabilities. Membership is defined in federal regulation and provides states the flexibility to add additional members. Through the proposed consolidation of the committees, the SRC will offer recommendation to the Governor to add the Department’s Developmental Disabilities Division Director and the Executive Director of the North Dakota Association of Community Providers to SRC’s membership.* With the proposed combination, following is a comparison of the common membership of both the Committee and SRC:

Committee on Employment of Person with Disabilities (Committee)	State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)
DHS VR Director	DHS VR Director
DHS Developmental Disabilities Director	DHS Developmental Disabilities Director *
Executive Director of North Dakota Association for Community Providers	Executive Director of North Dakota Association for Community Providers *
Department of Commerce State Workforce Director	Department of Commerce - State Workforce Board
Department of Public Instruction Director of Special Education	Department of Public Instruction - Special Education Program
Protection and Advocacy Executive Director or designee	Protection and Advocacy - Client Assistance Representative
Community Employer	Four Community Employers
One individual with a disability	One individual with a disability

Funding

If this legislation passes, a portion of the fees collected for accessible parking certificates issued by the North Dakota Department of Transportation and federal funds will be used for administrative support to the SRC. Additional expenses incurred by the SRC include members’ travel, printing of the annual report, and other expenses required for the operation of the SRC. State general funds are currently used to support

the activities of the Committee. The 2017-2019 Executive Budget Request does not include funding for the Committee as the Department is proposing consolidation in this bill. The amendment to Section 54-44.3-20 will eliminate the reference to the director of the committee on employment of people with disabilities.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have. Thank you.