



**PROTECTION & ADVOCACY PROJECT**  
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**ND Protection & Advocacy Project**  
**Commends Legislature for Commitment to Accessibility**

(Bismarck, ND) North Dakota prides itself on being one of the most open legislatures in the country. Last legislative session, our Legislature became more accessible and open to the public than it has ever been. The ND Protection & Advocacy Project, the State's premier civil rights organization for people with disabilities, commends the efforts of the Legislature and Legislative Council. All North Dakotans had the opportunity to take part in our political process by submitting written testimony online, testifying virtually, or watching and listening to committee hearings and floor sessions online.

Livestreaming during the 67th Legislative Session drew just shy of 500,000 views. For the first time ever, people from across the state could watch their lawmakers hear testimony and discuss bills in real-time. Over 2,000 people delivered testimony remotely from a location of their choosing. The efforts of Legislative Council and all who were involved in expanding online accessibility cannot be understated or overappreciated.

Remote participation removed barriers for all people, especially those with disabilities. Getting to the Capitol in Bismarck can be challenging in the middle of winter. It takes time off work, gas money, transportation, and may involve childcare or personal/home care arrangements. These barriers are often amplified for people with disabilities. Remote participation allowed people with disabilities and those who care about them to deliver meaningful testimony to our legislators. Physical accessibility to meeting rooms was no longer a barrier. Closed captioning was available on a computer or mobile device. Participation could be accomplished from devices with internet connections at an accommodation of the participant's choosing. Written testimony of legislators, government officials and employees, lobbyists, and members of the public remains available on the Legislative Assembly website in written form and was often posted online ahead of the hearing date. People were able to sign up to testify online and given the option to deliver testimony in-person or virtually.

Leading up to the 68<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session, our state Capitol building will have physical changes made to improve compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act 2010 Standards. Restrooms are being renovated, doors are being replaced, listening devices are being added, and signage is being updated. These changes will improve physical accessibility to our legislative process in addition to the remote accessibility afforded in the last session.

These significant increases in accessibility should be celebrated and built upon. The North Dakota Constitution sets forth that all sessions of the legislative assembly must be open and public, and that North Dakotans have a right to testify before lawmakers asking for new laws or changes to laws that affect them. North Dakota's Legislature is truly working towards creating a completely inclusive and accessible legislature. These efforts give life to the words "[a]ll political power is inherent in the people."

The North Dakota Protection & Advocacy Project is a federally mandated, independent state agency established in 1977 to advance the human and legal rights of people with disabilities. P&A's mission is to champion the equality and inclusion of people with disabilities where we live, work and play. P&A fulfills its mission by providing services to individuals with disabilities and their support networks; these services include information and referral, assistance with self-advocacy, education and training, advocacy services, legal representation, protective services, and systems and legislative advocacy.

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