

Disability Rights Nebraska

Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities

May 8, 2019

Dear Senators:

Disability Rights Nebraska is the designated Protection and Advocacy organization for people with disabilities in Nebraska. We are writing to express our support for changing the term “hearing-impaired” to “deaf and hard of hearing” in Nebraska statutes as proposed in LB 248.

The National Association of the Deaf explains why Nebraska’s statutes need to be updated to reflect contemporary language that is preferred by most people who are deaf or hard of hearing¹:

“Hearing-impaired – This term is no longer accepted by most in the community but was at one time preferred, largely because it was viewed as politically correct. To declare oneself or another person as deaf or blind, for example, was considered somewhat bold, rude, or impolite. At that time, it was thought better to use the word ‘impaired’ along with ‘visually,’ ‘hearing,’ ‘mobility,’ and so on. ‘Hearing-impaired’ was a well-meaning term that is not accepted or used by many deaf and hard of hearing people.

For many people, the words ‘deaf’ and ‘hard of hearing’ are not negative. Instead, the term ‘hearing-impaired’ is viewed as negative. The term focuses on what people can’t do. It establishes the standard as ‘hearing’ and anything different as ‘impaired,’ or substandard, hindered, or damaged. It implies that something is not as it should be and ought to be fixed if possible. To be fair, this is probably not what people intended to convey by the term ‘hearing impaired.’ ”

As our culture has changed regarding the assumptions and perceptions of people who are deaf or hard of hearing, so should our language—especially language that has the authority of state statute.

We urge the legislature to advance LB 248.

Sincerely,

Bradley A. Meurrens, MPA
Public Policy Director
Disability Rights Nebraska

¹ National Association of the Deaf, “Community and Culture – Frequently Asked Questions”, available at <https://www.nad.org/resources/american-sign-language/community-and-culture-frequently-asked-questions/>