Legacy Hearing Testimony

March 13, 2017

**JOAN:**

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Joan Willshire, and I am the Executive Director of the Minnesota State Council on Disability. For 43 years, MSCOD has served as the State’s primary resource on accessibility and disability policy, working at the intersection of the ADA, State Building Code and the Minnesota Human Rights Act.

The purpose of Legacy funds is to honor the natural and cultural legacy of the State of Minnesota. In our case, Minnesota played a unique and powerful role in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, a landmark civil rights law for the disability community. In light of that, in FY14-15 in anticipation of the 25th anniversary of the ADA in July 2015, MSCOD applied for and received funding for: the creation of a TpT documentary on the history of the ADA from Minnesota’s perspective, featuring former Senator Dave Durenberger, along with a live TpT broadcast of an employment dialogue, and an ADA celebration at the Minnesota History Center.

The event was a rousing success. Not only were we able to collaborate with the History Center to put together a compelling exhibit on the ADA, the event gave us the opportunity to celebrate the cultural fabric of the disability community in Minnesota. We commissioned artists with disabilities to produce artwork about what the ADA means to them, now available as posters.

[Displays painting by Annie Young]

This painting was done by an artist who is blind and is a testament to the vibrancy of our community.

Then, in October of 2015, we held an employment dialogue and job fair for Minnesotans with disabilities. The disability community experiences one of the highest unemployment rates of any demographic and we wanted to reflect, 25 years after the passage of the ADA, on the barriers to employment that still exist for Minnesotans with disabilities. We were joined at that event by former Iowa Senator Tom Harkin, the author of the ADA, to discuss the impact of the law.

Finally, we have partnered with CTV and Ampers community radio to produce programming on the legacy of the ADA. We partnered with CTV to film interviews with Commissioner of Human Rights, Kevin Lindsey, Jamie Tincher, the Governor’s Chief of Staff, along with a number of human rights activists, on the importance of access and inclusion. We also produced on program on accessibility at the State Fairgrounds. Currently, we are working with Ampers to produce 90-second interviews with people with disabilities on the impact of the ADA on their lives.

Now, I will hand it over to MSCOD’s Legislative Coordinator, George Shardlow, to describe our current request and how we hope to build on our previous work.

**GEORGE:**

Thank you, Mr. Chair. As Joan mentioned, the request you see before you is an effort to continue our efforts to honor Minnesota’s legacy in the passage of the ADA and the culture of Minnesota’s disability community.

First, our work with the State History Center has been institutionalized as an ongoing exhibit. The present request includes funds to hold another annual celebration there.

Second, part of the feedback we received after the 25th anniversary was that we needed a larger presence in Greater Minnesota. Therefore, the request includes funds to partner with local organizations throughout the State, in order to celebrate the ADA, build disability awareness, and highlight the cultural achievements of the local disability community.

In furtherance of these projects, our request includes funding for a 0.8 FTE to administer grants and coordinate event planning and logistics.

Lastly, in the interest of supporting efforts to celebrate disability culture year round, our request includes funds to pay for captioning and broadcast fees for disability programming on cable access television.

We are happy to stand for questions.