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TESTIMONY

BILL: SB 164

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

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Good morning Chairman Arberry and members of the Committee. I am Mike Willden, Director of the Department of Human Resources. With me today is Todd Butterworth, the acting Chief of the Office of Community Based Services. We are here to support SB 164, which would create the Office of Disability Services within the Department of Human Resources and move the Office of Community Based Services from the Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation to the Department of Human Resources.

The Strategic Plan for People with Disabilities, authorized by Assembly Bill 513 of the 71st Legislature, recommended that an Office of Disability Services be established. This Office will operate as the state-level coordinating body among agencies of state government providing services to people with disabilities and serve as the focal point within state government for the interests of people with disabilities and their families. Persons with disabilities and members of the public will be consulted prior to establishing policies or making decisions that will affect the lives of persons with disabilities.

ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS

DATE: 5/20/03 ROOM: 3137 EXHIBIT C
SUBMITTED BY: Mr. Mike Willden, DHR

C-1064

Programs currently under the Office of Community Based Services that will transfer to the new Office of Disability Services are:

- Personal Care Assistance Services
- Program for Persons with Traumatic Brain Injuries
- Telecommunications Relay Services
- Independent Living Services
- Assistive Technology and
- The Developmental Disabilities Council and all of its programs.

Nevada is already very unique nationally in having all these programs co-located. By moving them closer to other key programs, which serve people with disabilities, such as Medicaid, Aging Services and Mental Health, the opportunities for coordination will be improved considerably.

Creating the Office of Disability Services does not require any new funds and is included in the Executive budget. SB 164 also clarifies that the telephone surcharge for relay services applies to wireless phone lines, in addition to traditional "land lines." This is not a new tax. Wireless users are mandated by federal law to have access to relay services and, under Nevada regulations, are required to share in the cost. The Public Utilities Commission is already collecting this fee from wireless phone users; the language in SB 164 simply makes NRS consistent with federal law and state regulations.

The reason SB 164 has a two-thirds majority requirement is that it transfers funding for the existing Deaf Resource Centers from the general fund to the relay surcharge. This transfer will save up to \$110,000 annually in general fund dollars. But, the transfer could theoretically cause the relay surcharge rate to go up in the future. This is why a two-thirds vote is required for passage.

However, it is important to note that both the Public Utilities Commission and the Rehabilitation Division agree that the current surcharge rate is sufficient to fund the Deaf Resource Centers for the foreseeable future. And, the PUC is actually considering a CUT in the surcharge rate, even with the passage of this bill.

In summary, SB 164:

- o Recognizes the importance of disability services by designating an office to focus on serving Nevadans with disabilities.
- o Moves several existing disability programs from the Department of Employment Training and Rehabilitation, a department which is focused on employment, to the Department of Human Resources, which is focused on human services.
- o Creates a vehicle for better coordination among state disability services.
- o Gives recognition in Nevada law to the needs of Nevadans who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired.

- o Connects deaf and hard of hearing services to a funding stream that is not likely to be cut in tough economic times.

And,

- o Reduces general fund spending by up to \$110,000 per year.

I would be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have.