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Hello, my name is Gary Olsen and I am the director/advocate of the new Northern Nevada Deaf and Hard of Hearing Resource Center. I am here today in support of SB137 and the Senate Concurrent Resolution N0.10 provided the recommendations made below will some how be incorporated.

This bill apparently will be the last resort, for this session, of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Citizen's efforts to get the State of Nevada to recognize that there is a dire need for the recognition and inclusion of the citizens with communication disabilities.

It is said that the State of Nevada ranks first among all the states in the increase in the numbers of persons with disabilities over the past decade with the number of persons with disabilities in Nevada having increased by 157 percent over the past 10 years. It is also said that there are more than 375,000 persons with disabilities living in this state. Let me inform you of the 375,000 at least approximately 35,000 are either Deaf or Hard of Hearing and that includes people with speech impairments. In Nevada this number is no small thing, it comprises of taxpayers and potential ones as well.

It is commendable that the State goes a long way in recognizing the needs of people with disabilities (minus the Deaf and Hard of Hearing) and in coordinating the various State programs that serve them at great expense. It is also plausible that the State appropriated money to fund the development of a long-term strategic plan to ensure the availability and accessibility of services for the persons with disabilities. This effort did not include any active deaf or hard of hearing individuals. It just was assumed that our only needs were the continuance of using telephones (TTY) through the use of relay.

Many of you Senators are sensitive to important disability issues. Thank you so much for your commitment. And if and when the forming the Office of Disability Services through SB 164 becomes a reality it may make a difference. It is hoped that this act makes programs more streamlined, more effective and people more accountable.

However, there are several important components missing from SB 137 and the Resolution. What is missing is the real recognition of the difference between mobility and communication accessibility.

Previously we have been lumped and dumped into the handicapped category for so long yet with the new political correctness we are now lumped and dumped with the disability group. Our needs are still entirely different. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing people have entirely different needs, which is a mainly communication need as opposed to the known disability community proper's need which is mobility access issues. We both need the opportunity, to break down barriers but different barriers. We, too, want to be independent, law abiding citizens, have jobs and not keep the stigma labeled upon us for so long as being on the welfare rolls. The disabled community focus is different; they worry about institutionalization where we worry about obtaining our civil rights for a fair chance to make a go in our lives in Nevada. We want to be included in the scheme of determining our destinies on our own along with others but not having others determine our fate.

Even though during previous sessions, there have been established and disbanded of various offices serving the deaf and hard of hearing, it is imperative that this come to a stop and no further interruptions of services for the deaf be abolished or tokenized.

There is a serious need for creating a deaf and hard of hearing ombudsman position or reestablishing the Office of Deafness, or something just like the Bureau of the Blind.

The Nevadans with communication disabilities wish that all communication issues be addressed till we come to some workable solutions that will enable most all people to be able to communicate and work together. They should not be neglected any longer in this time and age. Our schools are not adequately meeting the needs of the deaf and hard of hearing children, the courts have along way to go, State Agencies need to collaborate to find better means of meeting the needs of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Nevadans.

It is our sincere hope that the new members of the Legislative Committee on Persons With Disabilities will listen, actually do in-depth studies, drawing upon the variety of experts in the field of deafness and make fair recommendations for action to ensure that the Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens obtain equal and accessible services from all State operated agencies with comprehensive programs, not token fixes nor lumping and dumping us in the disability category that does not, nor has it ever, cater to our needs..

In the spirit for OUR COUNTRY and for a Better Nevada, I am,

Thank you.