

TESTIMONY OF ALEC WILLARD

Buffalo, MN

Chair Bernardy and members:

My name is Alec Willard. Thank you for the chance to testify today in support of House File 4210.

I want to go to college and earn a degree or other credential in sports management. I like all kinds of sports and am very good at statistics and understanding team performance, as well as the importance of sports on individual health. I have participated in adapted sports or Special Olympics for many years. I am a young man with dreams of living independently and contributing to my community through meaningful employment. I am happiest and healthiest when I have opportunities for both meaningful work and for participation in inclusive community activities.

I completed my high school curriculum in 2015 and my transition program in 2018, and have been trying out different jobs since then -- at the local ice rink, a furniture store, and most recently a grocery store. I am a dedicated and hardworking employee and get good reviews from my managers and great feedback from customers where I work. While these jobs have been "okay" and filling my time, it's difficult to get enough hours to earn a living wage and the roles are not as meaningful as my dream job of sports management.

When I was looking at post-secondary options, my family and I discovered there are only 3 options in Minnesota – two are two-year colleges with only one-year occupational skills programs and no academic track in my area of interest, and the third is very expensive and does not offer a degree or certificate program that fits my interests. I am not a traditional learner but can make great progress if given the right supports. I need flexibility in the ways in which study material is given to me and how I best use it to complete the work required. I also would greatly benefit from having peer mentors to study with and having alternative ways to show that I understand the class requirements, as testing tends to freak me out. Finally, I need some sort of supported and safe housing options on campus as I do not drive, and require supports to ensure I am being safe. Inclusive Higher Education would provide me with the supports that I need in college. However, there currently is not a Minnesota college that

enrolls students with an intellectual disability and also offers a certificate or degree in my chosen career.

A college that is a good fit for me would be located in a larger metropolitan area, has good public transportation, offers inclusive and supported housing options, enrolls students with an intellectual disability and is affordable. I would benefit from paid internships and employment as part of my college certificate or degree. I want to learn and have a career in sports management. If given the opportunity, I can contribute to society and be a solution to the shortage of workers that we see all around us today.

We need more Minnesota college options for students like me and for that reason I ask that you support House File 4210. Thank you very much for your time.