

**Eric Nooker**  
**Grant Administrator, Minnesota Department of Agriculture**  
**Testimony in support of HF2017**

**State Government Finance and Elections Remote Hearing**  
**Thursday, February 10, 2022**

Good morning Mr. Chair and committee members. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

My name is Eric Nooker and I work as a grant administrator for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. I am testifying on my own behalf, not my employer's, and I am here on my own time. I have an undergraduate degree in Horticulture and a Master's degree in Soil Science.

I was born deaf and use cochlear implants and ASL to communicate. Struggles with communication barriers have made me stronger and a better self-advocate.

I've been an advocate for employing and retaining employees with disabilities since I became a state employee in 2014, just before Governor Dayton signed Executive Order 14-14.

I am fortunate to work in an environment where my employer ensures I receive the accommodations I need, where we are aware of resources available to me and my agency such as the accommodation fund. My past involvement with the C700 program relaunch has helped me work with the ADA Coordinators and hiring managers to set up what I needed to do my job.

I am excited when colleagues with disabilities become state employees, and yet sometimes they are not as fortunate as me. They may not be aware of state resources available to them and their agencies. Sometimes their hiring manager and agencies do not know much more than they do. Strong, knowledgeable ADA coordinators are important for this reason. A good coordinator can mean the difference between an employee successfully completing probation to become permanent vs. losing their job because the employee did not receive timely and reasonable accommodations during the 700-hour trial period.

I took time off to testify because I want to see people with disabilities, like me,

who have so much to contribute, to have a level playing field. I want others to have the same positive experiences I have had. I urge you to support the changes in HF2017, so we can do a better job of recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce.