**PLEASE SUPPORT SF1721/HF2004: BIPARTISAN LEGISLATION THAT WOULD CREATE A WORKING GROUP ON THE LEGISLATURE'S ACCESSIBILITY MEASURES**

People with disabilities comprise close to 20 percent of the state's population. In 2009 the legislature required state agencies to develop accessibility standards and in 2011 added funding in the base for the Office of Technology Accessibility to support the development and implementation of technology accessibility standards that conform to federal law. The statute includes an undue burden clause. The MNIT Technology Accessibility Advisory Committee is charged with developing standards that set high expectations, but are reasonable and do not cause an undue burden.

The House, Senate and the Joint Offices have voluntarily complied with the standard (16E.03. subdivision 9). They are dedicated to making e-government services accessible so the public, state employees and legislators, lobbyists and staff with disabilities can access documents that are posted online and have accessible websites. But without a standard that sets expectations, allows for exceptions, and dedicates resources, it is a difficult task. Without a standard that sets clear standards for staff and expectations for the public, the staff are put in a position of believing they have to respond to every request. Despite great effort on the staff's part, some citizens with disabilities are unable to access documents they need to participate in the legislative process and staff and legislators with disabilities are unable to do their jobs effectively.

This bill is supported by the Minnesota State Council on Disabilities and the Minnesota Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing.

The Working Group would begin its work July 15, 2019 and prepare a report for the legislature due January 15, 2019 that would:

**1) Identify ways the legislature's accessibility measures do not meet Executive Branch accessibility standards.
2) Identify issues and technologies that may present barriers to compliance.
3) Suggest a compliance exception process.
4) describe a plan to update the legislature's accessibility measures to be comparable required of state agencies under Minnesota statutes, section 16E.03, subdivision 9.
5) Estimate the costs to update the legislature's accountability measures. The working group doesn't need to consider making archived documents, recordings or publications accessible.**

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