

**Testimony in Support of Independent Living Services
Before the Ohio House of representatives
Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services**

By: Melanie Hogan, Executive Director,
Linking Employment, Abilities and Potential (LEAP), Cleveland, Ohio

Chairman Romanchuck, Ranking Member Sykes, and Representative LaTourette, Representative O'Brien, and Representative Sprague, my name is Melanie Hogan. I am the Executive Director of Linking Employment Abilities, and Potential (LEAP), a Center for Independent Living based in Cleveland. I am here today on behalf of all of the Directors of the 12 Centers for Independent living (CILs), in Ohio. Centers for Independent living were established under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to provide services and advocacy, by and for persons with disabilities, in order to create opportunities for independence, and assist individuals with all types of disabilities to achieve their maximum level of independent functioning within their families and communities.

CILs are cross-disability, non-residential, community-based, organizations that are unique in that they are directly governed and staffed by people with all types of disabilities; including people with mental, physical, sensory, cognitive, and developmental disabilities. Each of the 12 centers provide five core services: information and referral, individual and systems advocacy, peer support, independent living skills training, and transition services. Transition services were added as a fifth core service with the 2014 passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act within WIOA. Transition services include the transition of individuals with significant disabilities from nursing homes and other institutions to home and community-based residences with appropriate supports and services, assistance to individuals with significant disabilities at risk of entering institutions to remain in the community, and the transition of youth with significant disabilities to postsecondary life.

Collective Impact

There are more than 57 million Americans with disabilities; and approximately 1,627,000 of those people live in Ohio, over 14% of Ohio's population. Recent data indicates that most of the consumers that we serve live in poverty with a total household income between 13-18% of the Federal Poverty Level. In 2015 the employment rate for working age people with disabilities in Ohio (21-64) was 35.6% compared to 79.5% for their non-disabled counterparts.

Disability is personal, everyone knows someone with a vision loss, hearing loss, a heart problem, arthritis, or diabetes; Or someone with mobility issues who needs assistance getting around or getting daily tasks completed; or someone who deals with mental, emotional or cognitive conditions. People with disabilities are your constituents, neighbors, co-workers, friends and family members. Every year CILs provide the five core services as well as housing assistance, personal care assistance, transportation, and employment services to thousands of Ohioans with disabilities.

Our collective mission is to work with individuals, our society and government, so that persons with disabilities are able to:

1. Make informed choices about their own lives and the services that they receive

2. Access formal and informal supports that enable persons to live as independently as possible in the community instead of in an institution
3. And to become as self-sufficient as possible, as persons with disabilities receive the tools they need to assist them to become full participants in this society.

When services are delivered in home or community based setting, the result is a tremendous cost savings to Medicaid, Medicare, and other state funded programs. Community-based services enable people with disabilities to become less reliant on long-term government supports, and they are significantly less expensive than institutional type settings.

The need for increased funding for Centers for Independent Living

The need for increased funding for Centers for Independent Living is critical in order to provide services to unserved and underserved populations. Increased funding will also enable CILs across the State to assist the developmental disability, vocational rehabilitation and workforce systems deliver on the of changes in the Home and Community Based Rule (HCBS) rule and WIOA .

The state biennium budget that you have before you contains a significant challenge to those of us providing independent living services to a portion of the more than 14% of Ohioans who could benefit from supports and services.

On behalf of the 12 Centers for Independent Living, and those we serve, I have two requests:

1) Ensure that statutory language is included in the budget that clearly states the purpose of the Independent Living program and services, and includes the Federal statute that authorizes the program.

By including this language, Ohio specifically affirms its commitment to allocate GRF (state) dollars to fund the work of the CILs in the provision of independent living (IL) services and to support the OSILC's efforts to coordinate and increase the impact of independent living services throughout the state. By including the federal citation, it is recognized that this program is authorized under Title VII of the Independent Living Services and Centers for Independent Living of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992, 106 Stat. 4344, 29 U.S.C. 796d.

2) Reinstate the CIL line item (415-520) for the Centers for Independent Living: The CILs used to get GRF dollars to deliver services. Currently the only GRF dollars allocated to Independent Living go to the Statewide Independent Living Council and are used to draw down Federal match. Some of these funds leverage \$3.69 for every state dollar, while other GRF dollars draw down the Federal Part funds for the Centers at a 9:1 match.

On behalf of the Centers I respectfully request that the line item be reinstated and funded with \$1.7 million dollars. This amount will ensure the Centers' ability to deliver an increased **level of independent living services in a time of increased need, and to expand the availability of independent living services to more Ohioans throughout our existing service areas as well as in areas of the state where services are not available.** This investment will also bring Ohio in line with other states in the region that invest an even greater amount in the dignity and quality of life of persons with disabilities.

Ohio's investment in independent living services benefits all Ohioans

We are fully aware that asking you to restore and fund our line item will be difficult in a challenging budget environment. We also know that many members of the legislature understand the value of our services and the return on investment that independent living services can generate. For example:

- **Increased Fiscal Responsibility and Decreased Dependence on Public Assistance:** Centers provide required supports and services recognizing that disability benefits are offsets to the high costs of disability, rather than subsidies for the inability to work. We provide benefits assistance and analysis in order to support a person with a disability in understanding the relationship between their benefits and their employment goals.
- **Community Based Living:** Assisting persons who are able to transition from institutions back into the community settings of their choice generates savings for the state when people with disabilities utilize Home and Community Based Waiver services. It costs on average more than \$75,000 per year for a person to live in a semi-private nursing home room. A person can be provided IL services so he or she can live in the community, saving the state millions of dollars on institutional care.
- **Employment and Increased Tax Revenue:** It takes a variety of services to address the needs and barriers experienced by persons with disabilities as they seek to be fully integrated, contributing members of society. Essential vocational rehabilitation services are augmented by independent living skills services, remedial and enrichment education and training, personal assistance services, accessible/affordable housing and transportation, access to assistive aids and devices, income supports and health care --all of these services are necessary so that individuals with significant disabilities can successfully live and work in the community.

In addition to the above services, LEAP's provides employment services to youth and adults in partnership with Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) and the Developmental Disabilities system. We are strongly supported by the Northeast Ohio philanthropic community to develop employers' capacity to hire, train, and retain people with disabilities, who, at 8% of the population, are the largest un sourced pool of people looking for work.

Independent Living is an Efficient Use of State Resources and Fiscally Responsible

Funding provided to Centers for Independent Living (CILs):

- Helps to keep individuals out of nursing homes and institutions, by providing services that support safe and healthy living in the community
- Helps youth with disabilities transition to the work of work
- Helps people with disabilities work safely in the community by providing the necessary training and supports

On behalf of the Ohio Association of Centers for Independent Living, I thank you for this opportunity to testify, for the support that the general assembly has given us in the past, and for your thoughtful consideration of increasing the availability of the invaluable and extremely cost-effective services CILs provide.

Thank you. I'll be happy to try to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

Melanie Hogan

Executive Director

Linking Employment, Abilities and Potential (LEAP)