

Written testimony of Kathryn Shelley, Disability Rights Advocate at The Ability Center of Greater Toledo, Sylvania, Ohio, to the Health and Human Services Subcommittee, Finance Committee, Ohio House of Representatives
April 10, 2019

Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member West, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I respectfully request that the CIL line item (415-520) for the Centers for Independent Living be reinstated. Currently the only GRF dollars allocated to Independent Living go to the Statewide Independent Living Council.

Reinstating and funding the CIL line item (415-520), as well as increasing funding for Ohio's twelve Centers for Independent Living across the state to \$1.8 million for the biennium, will improve the Centers' ability to deliver an increased level of independent living services to under-served and unserved persons with disabilities in a time of increased need, and to expand the reach availability of independent living services to more Ohioans who are currently not able to access our services due to not living in the existing service areas.

The Ability Center of Greater Toledo is one of the twelve Centers for Independent Living, serving the Northwest Ohio Counties of Defiance, Fulton, Henry, Lucas, Ottawa, Williams and Wood. Our mission is to assist people with disabilities to live, work, and socialize within a fully accessible community, and we provide services that include advocacy, information and referral, independent living skills, peer support and mentoring, as well as transition and diversion to ensure people with disabilities who wish to live independently in their community have the proper supports to do so instead of living and receiving care in a nursing facility or institution.

We also have a program entitled Assistance Dogs for Achieving Independence, which helps children and adults with disabilities achieve greater independence through the training and placement of service and therapy dogs, and we have our Home Accessibility Program with completes home modification projects for individuals with disabilities in order to make independent living a reality. Additionally, we have an Equipment Loan program which provides individuals with disability-related equipment such as walkers, manual and electric wheelchairs or durable medical equipment such as shower benches and bedside commodes, on a temporary basis at no cost to the consumer.

These services that we are able to provide cannot be done without proper funding. We are fortunate to received funds from philanthropic donations and grants, but we, along with the other eleven Centers for Independent Living in the State of Ohio, would be able to expand the reach of our programs and ensure that the programs continue to thrive so that people with disabilities living in Ohio can continue to thrive and live independently.

One of the core services we are required to provide as a Center for Independent Living is Nursing Home Transition, transitioning those with disabilities out of nursing facilities and into their own housing if they so choose and are able.

- Ohio is one of the leading states in the country in transitioning people with disabilities from institutions into the community.
- Ohio transitioned **11,455** people from 2008-2017 from large institutions to independent living.
- Reported statewide numbers as of 8/21/18 for HOME Choice are **12,401 transitions** to date.
- To date, **The Ability Center of Greater Toledo's Nursing Home Transition Program** has had **524 total transitions** through HOME Choice since **2008**.
- **77%** of those who have transitioned have reached **365 days of independence**.

Furthermore, Centers for Independent Living save the State of Ohio money.

- According to recent Ohio Department of Medicaid statistics, serving people with disabilities in the community rather than in large institutions ends up **saving** the
- Department of Medicaid an estimated **\$40,000** per person, per year in long-term care funding.
- In 2016, Ohio spent **\$42,715** on Medicaid supports for **persons in the community** compared to **\$80,517** on Medicaid supports for **persons living in institutions**.
- In 2017, the average annual Medicaid savings was \$39,100/person (12,401 x \$39,100 = **\$484,879,100 potential cost savings** for every year an individual remains in the community).

Therefore, increased funding is an investment into greater care and services for Ohioans with disabilities, and the investment made has the potential to save the State of Ohio much more money than it invests in its Centers for Independent Living.

And For Me, It's Personal:

I am a person with a disability, and I not only work for The Ability Center of Greater Toledo, but The Ability Center has also provided me with services in order to help me live independently, and I would not be where I am today without them. My connection with The Ability Center started in 2001, when I was a camper in The Ability Center's Camp Cricket program – a Summer Camp program for both children with disabilities and without disabilities. Prior to this point in my life, I had not had much interaction with other children with disabilities, and so this was a great way for me to connect with others like myself and give me a sense of community. Furthermore, it was at this time that I learned that at least 51% of staff and the board of trustees for a Center for Independent Living such as The Ability Center are required to be people with disabilities. Seeing people with disabilities like my own, as well as those with disabilities different from my own, working and thriving in a professional setting really drove home to me that I can not only obtain employment as an adult, but also make a difference in my community while doing so.

I am a graduate of the Disability Studies Program at The University of Toledo, which The Ability Center helped to establish. The Disability Studies program at The University of Toledo was the first of its kind in the country to offer a major in Disability Studies, and I feel very fortunate to have been a part of that program. Furthermore, my assistance dog, Petunia, is a graduate of The Ability Center's Assistance Dogs for Achieving Independence Program, and her ability to assist me to perform tasks such as picking up dropped items, opening doors, and assist with dressing has truly helped me to feel more confident not

only in my ability to live independently, but in my ability to be independent in public settings and not have to rely on others for assistance.

As you can see, investing in Centers for Independent Living is personal for me and it is my hope that you will consider our request for re-instating the line item and increasing funding for CILs. In doing so, you help others like me, and you directly assist Centers for Independent Living in ensuring Ohioans with disabilities can attain independence.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Kathryn Shelley
Disability Rights Advocate
The Ability Center of Greater Toledo