



The Center for Disability Empowerment

Providing Resources and Advocacy for Community Living in Central Ohio

March 13, 2017

Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Minority Member Sykes and Members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, The Center for Disability Empowerment appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony to you about Ohio's Centers for Independent Living.

The Center for Disability Empowerment is one of twelve Centers for Independent Living in Ohio and the newest. Centers for Independent Living were established under the federal Rehabilitation Act in the 1970s and exist across the United States. Centers are driven by the Independent Living philosophy which emphasizes consumer control with the idea that people with disabilities are the best experts on their own needs, who have a crucial and valuable perspective to contribute and are deserving of equal opportunity to decide how to live, work, and take part in their communities, particularly about services that powerfully affect their day-to-day lives and access to independence.

We offer core services to any person with any disability of any age (unique in disability services). Core services include Information and Referral, Independent Living Skills development, Peer Support (person with disability supporting person with a disability), advocacy (individual and systems) and Transition (Individuals transitioning from institutional settings back into the community and youth transitioning from school to post-secondary education, employment, living in the community, etc.)

Each Center offers more than the core services, depending on the needs of their local community and available resources. CDE, for instance, offers training and consulting on the Americans with Disabilities Act. We also contract with the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities to develop curriculum and conduct trainings around the state for individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities regarding employment, community safety and abuse/bullying prevention.

Providing independent living services is much less expensive than paying for individuals to live in institutional settings, like nursing facilities and Individual Care Facilities for individuals with Intellectual/Developmental disabilities. CILs transition people from these settings but more importantly can prevent admission to such settings to begin with. For those who have returned to the community from institutional settings CILs can provide follow along support and services if the individual requests them, not just until funding ends through whatever program or waiver they have. Neither consumers or state/local agencies need to jump through "bureaucratic hoops" at any point to access support as we require no proof of eligibility or income. In short, we do whatever it takes to support individuals with disabilities in the community...an incredible value to the community.

Ohio ranks in the very bottom in the amount of state dollars allocated to assist CILs in comparison to other states in our region of the country. In year's past Ohio's Centers for Independent Living had been allocated GRF dollars in a line item in the state budget.. These funds were critical to the operation of efficient delivery of our core services. More importantly they were critical to individuals with disabilities in this state. In ensuing years these funds were gradually eliminated. At no charge to individuals with disabilities, this funding offered opportunity to live, worship, work, socialize and live in communities where they would live alongside their families and peers who do not have disabilities. CDE respectfully asks that you reinstate a line item dedicated to our services. Further, we ask that you consider \$1.7 million to bring Ohio in line with other states in the region for these vital services.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Hetrick, Executive Director