

Testimonial of John Ballard, Executive Director

Tri-County Independent Living Center, Inc. serving persons with disability in

Portage, Stark, Summit and Wayne Counties

Board Member, Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council

Chairman Hackett, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Thomas and Distinguished Sub-Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today. The Ohio House of Representatives has included the line item 415511 Centers for Independent Living to be funded at \$450,000 annually. We hope the committee will support our request for this line item to be funded at \$900,000 annually.

Ohio's Centers have worked years to assist any Ohioan with any disability and of any age to live successfully in their community vs. an institution. We coach, teach, assist, block, tackle and do whatever it takes. The Centers have filled a service gap in Ohio and enabled us to lower our cost per person.

In 1983, I was the Director of Residential Services at Summit County DD responsible for institutional diversion, transitions from State institutions and all residential services. We would receive referrals from the Probate Court, Adult Protective Services and from the community for persons with disability in desperate need. SB 169 provided us legislative authority to assist only a percentage of those with a disability, not everyone. When we were made aware that the Reagan Administration was expanding this successful low cost California program to more counties in Ohio, including Portage, Stark and Summit, it was great news as they worked with any disabled person. When Tri-County opened its doors, we now had an effective community partner to refer families and individuals to.

The Centers have demonstrated in Ohio, and every State, that persons with disability can live in the community at a lower cost to taxpayers. In Ohio, we have modified the Center model and initiated programs, such as "drop-in", to enable persons with DD to live in the community. Ohio has been able to transition individuals from institutions to group homes and on to community living and reduce costs.

The Centers are unique in that a majority of all Center Boards and staff are persons with a disability. Borrowing from AA, the most successful organization ever in the U.S. to enable persons with to live in the community, each Center provides the following services and supports:

- Specialized Information & Referral
- Self-Advocacy and Systems Advocacy
- Independent Living Skills Training and Coaching
- We assist individuals to transition from nursing homes and other institutions to the community

- Peer to Peer Support
- We also work with youth 14-22 with any disability to achieve a successful post-secondary life

According to testimony from Ohio Medicaid and Federal reports, transitioning individuals from institutions saves taxpayers over \$40,000 per year or more. Providing services that divert people from institutional settings saves even more. In the last 10 years alone, we have served approximately 14,000 Ohioans a year to transition from institutions or avoid them, and to live, go to school, work and fully participate in their communities. We can't know how many people would have been institutionalized without our support. Based on industry statistics, conservatively, our efforts save the taxpayers millions annually. Of course the brave Ohioans we assist deserve all the credit.

I've been fortunate to work alongside our disability community since 1971 and am thankful for the tremendous progress that has taken place in Ohio.

Thank you for your time,

John Ballard