

Written testimony of Kevin Flynn, Cincinnati, Chairperson of the Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council to the Health and Human Services Subcommittee, Finance Committee, Ohio House March 1, 2023

Chairman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I submit this today asking for your support for a total of \$1,500,000 annually for line item 415-511 for the Centers for Independent Living.

You have a difficult job. I understand that there are numerous requests relative to the budget, all of them worthy, and not enough revenue to support these requests. I experienced much the same thing on a smaller scale, when I served as a Councilman for the City of Cincinnati. After leaving City Council, I joined the Center for Independent Living Options Board in Cincinnati and soon thereafter was appointed by Governor Kasich, and subsequently reappointed by Governor DeWine to the Statewide Independent Living Council. I also serve on the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Council. I believe in the mission of the Centers for Independent Living. Just because life has put up a barrier, it doesn't mean that you have to stop living. In fact, with the assistance of others and working together, we can and must knock those barriers over.

Funding Independent Living Centers in your communities throughout Ohio give people the tools to go to work. Nothing is easy when you have a disability. Whether it is transportation, or job training, or even having a place to live, it is harder with a disability. We don't want a hand out, just level the playing field a little, so that we can compete on a fair basis with others. Increasing this funding will allow the Centers to reach more unserved and underserved persons with disabilities throughout Ohio. This funding is an investment which will reduce reliance by individuals on government aid programs and increase state tax revenue as more people with disabilities get living wage paying jobs.

Independent living isn't a theory to me. 21 years ago (my family and I celebrated my 'Life Day' last week), I was involved in a catastrophic automobile accident that left me with quadriplegia. I was one of the lucky ones. My family and community have allowed me to remain a productive member of our society. I am blessed. I have a great support network: A fantastic wife, three great kids, and a network of friends, professional colleagues, and even strangers that have enabled me to get back to living. Not everyone with a physical or developmental challenge has the same people behind them. I know that I could not be here today if it were not for all of the many, many people that have helped me get here. The CILs provide help to the many people who don't have the support system I have.

Before my accident, I was a husband and a father of three children, a real estate lawyer, and a professor at the University of Cincinnati. After my accident, I remained: a husband and a father of three, now grown, children; a real estate lawyer; and a professor at the University of Cincinnati. I am now at an age where I can devote more of my time helping others with disabilities and start to pay back the tremendous opportunities in life that I have been given. Please help the Centers for Independent Living help other Ohioans to attain independence, reach for their opportunities, and contribute to making our great state even greater. Please support this proposal. Thank you.

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