

Maria A. Matzik  
House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services  
Interested Party Testimony, HB 33

March 23, 2023

Chairperson Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 33, increasing funding to Centers for Independent Living.

My name is Maria Matzik, and I am 52 years old. I am the Education and Advocacy Specialist at the Access Center for Independent Living in Dayton. The Access Center is one of 12 Independent Living Centers in Ohio.

The Access Center for Independent Living is a non-profit, non-residential center for independent living. Our mission is to ensure that people with disabilities have complete access to the communities in which they wish to live. We do so through offering advocacy, information and referral, independent living skills training, peer support, transitioning from institutional to community settings, and many other services.

We have a recycled equipment program where people from the community can donate used medical equipment and we turn over ownership to someone who cannot get that piece of equipment by any other means. The Center does not charge a fee for any service provided. The Center gratefully accepts donations. Donations to the Access Center are tax deductible.

Every year the Access Center strives to offer the most up-dated workshops on the most requested topics that pertain to people with disabilities. In order to provide the most current information to the public on issues that are crucial to people with disabilities we look to community experts to donate their time and knowledge. We do not have available funds to compensate presenters.

I am writing this testimony to illustrate the importance of, and unique roles, that Centers for Independent Living play in our communities. I will use my story as an example of the need for Centers and the work they do.

I have Spinal Muscular Atrophy Type II, a form of Muscular Dystrophy. I use the assistance of a ventilator and I have a tracheostomy. I use a reclining motorized wheelchair for mobility.

I came to Ohio in 1990 to attend Wright State University. Wright State was the only college and / or university, out of 89 that I wrote to, that would meet with me and discuss my disability related accommodation needs to attend and be successful.

I had just completed a 4-year college degree at Wright State University in 1995 where I juggled a full class schedule, student attendants and agency nurses. I was looking forward to graduation and beginning a new life here in Ohio. I am from Pennsylvania originally. Representatives from Ohio Job and Family Services informed me that since I did not have 2 hours, of my care needs

covered per day, that I was not safe and the best place for me would be a nursing home. This depended on whether I decided to stay in Ohio, change my residency and not return to Pennsylvania. I appealed the decision and was granted a hearing but was warned that I would not win.

Staff and Advocates from the Access Center prepared me for the hearing. They educated me on what to expect and what to prepare for questioning. They attended the hearing with me and testified on my behalf. The invaluable lessons that they taught me regarding advocating for myself made me the advocate that I am today. They supported me and guided me, and as a result I won my freedom to, “have complete access to the community in which I chose to live.”

Centers for Independent Living support and educate individuals to be advocates. They support individuals in their journey to independence and inclusion. They are often the best kept secret because we are misunderstood for the important work that we do. Many times, we are the last-ditch effort by an individual seeking assistance after all other social service organizations have failed them.

Most people view “disability” as an “illness” or a “condition”. It is just a natural part of life for most of us. I don’t have to think about what my needs are – I know my needs just like you know yours. The difference is that you perform your tasks independently. Many individuals with disabilities need the assistance of another person. That does not mean that they are any less independent than you. Independence does not mean doing things for yourself. It means having the right to choose and the freedom to fail.

Chairperson Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, please help us to ensure that “Civil Rights” are provided to all individuals. We strive to be part of a community that works together to demand equal rights for ALL citizens.

In closing, I am asking you to support the funding increase, to Centers for Independent Living, as outlined in HB 33.

Respectfully Submitted March 23, 2023

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