



Proponent Testimony on HB257
Senate Government Oversight Committee
Wednesday, June 26, 2024

Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee, thank you for your time in reviewing this testimony on House Bill 257.

My name is Jeremy Morris, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), a State affiliated Council that promotes independence and inclusion for individuals with significant disabilities across the State of Ohio.

Our organization operates with a 19-person Council, that must be a majority of individuals with disabilities. A challenge we have always faced when recruiting members is the individual's ability to physically attend our meetings. Whether it is due to not being able to have the support of a direct care worker, lack of access to accessible transportation especially from rural communities, or factors that are related to their disability that may prevent them from full participation in the in-person meetings.

By allowing the Ohio SILC to conducted meetings in a virtual and hybrid approach the following will be achieved:

- **Increased accessibility** – The Council members and the public both will have greater access and accessibility to the work and business of the Council. During the time when the SILC was allowed to conduct meetings virtually, there was an increase in the public members that attended our meetings. We were also able to incorporate real time captioning of the meetings, as well as having ASL interpreters available. Virtual and hybrid formats of meetings overall led to greater meeting accessibility for the public that is interested and wants to engage in our work.
- **Efficiency** – Through the process of conducting virtual and hybrid meetings, the Council made significant updates to increase the efficiency of meetings. This included the purchase of two cameras that operate in a way that captures not only the video but the audio in a full panoramic mode. These cameras also feature the ability to zoom in on the current speaker, so the public has a clear view of what is happening in the meetings. In the meeting room, we also set up projector, showing the captioning and showing the individuals attending virtually. The Ohio SILC has also launched a new website feature specifically for our meetings. On this website the public will be able to view voting and attendance records of members, past meetings and documents, as well as subscribe for all meetings held to receive automatic email notification of every meeting notice and agenda.
- **Productivity** – The SILC members are dedicated to advancing the mission of the organization. Due to the physical meeting requirements, we have to limit the number of meetings of our

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Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council

Council and committees. If we had access to hybrid and virtual meetings, the SILC members could have more regular meetings of the committees and increase the productivity of our organization. Our Members want to be more engaged and conduct the work of the SILC on a more frequent basis, this bill will allow us to do that.

- **Reduction of Cost** – Currently to accommodate the regular meeting of the SILC we cover all reasonable cost for travel and accommodations for our Council Members. Due to the nature of some Member’s disabilities, we may have to provide additional accommodation such as transportation services, personal care assistance, overnight lodging, and other cost associated with providing reasonable accommodations. In doing this, we often utilize meeting spaces at hotels to accommodate the physical space requirements. If members were able to attend virtually for a hybrid meeting, we would have the capacity to host the public meetings out of our own office with space for those members and public that would like to attend in person.

During the time when allowance was granted to conduct meetings by virtual means, our Council saw some of the highest public participation and attendance at our meetings. Due to this, we have continued to always have meetings available for the public to view virtually. We have implemented a new website platform that allows for easier access to meeting information, notices, and updates to the public as well as committing to always have American Sign Language interpreters and captioning services for our full Council meetings.

Federal regulations already require us to have meetings that are open to the public with advanced notice. We want to enhance all of this by incorporating fully accessible hybrid meetings available to the SILC members and the public on a permanent basis.

Thank you,
Jeremy Morris
Executive Director

Promoting Independence, Empowerment, and Inclusion in Ohio.

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