

Testimonial of John Ballard, Executive Director

Tri-County Independent Living Center, Inc.

Akron, Ohio

June 6, 2017

Chairman Oelslager, Ranking Member Skindell and Distinguished Committee Members, as the Executive Director of the Tri-County Independent Living Center, Inc. (TCILC), I am asking for your consideration to reinstate the CIL line item (415520) to the state budget and \$360,000 in GRF dollars. Tri-County would use any additional State funds to expand services to rural areas in and around Stark, Summit and Portage Counties. Only 43 Counties currently receive independent living services.

TCILC has provided Independent Living Services to individuals with disabilities residing in Portage, Stark or Summit County since 1985. We also provide adult transition services to residents of Medina and Wayne Counties. We are one of 12 Independent Living Centers in Ohio. We provide the following services to Ohioans with disabilities, designed to help them live independently in the community:

Information and Referral

Individual and Systems Advocacy

Peer Support

Independent Living Skills Training

Nursing Home and ICF Transitions

Youth Transitions to post-secondary life

Job Development & Coaching

Provide Adaptive Equipment, such as ramps, wheel chairs and walkers.

We have assisted over 30,000 Ohioans with disabilities to live, worship, work and raise their families with dignity in the communities of their choice. Further, we have enabled the taxpayers of Ohio to see their tax dollars used more efficiently. Why should Ohioans pay more for residential alternatives which are more restrictive and costly than required?

Independent Living Centers come about due the efforts of individuals with substantial disabilities, who created a movement. I began volunteering in independent living in 1971, with other members of our Church. We provided homemaker, peer to peer support and advocacy services to students at the University of Akron and later expanded to the wider community. I think we provided a lot of assistance, but it was difficult to provide consistent services and meet the demands with only volunteers.

In 1975, the request of Senator Oliver Ocasek, I was one of 2 volunteers from the Independent Living movement who testified before Senator Harry Meshel and the Senate Appropriations Committee asking for funding to start Ohio's first independent living program to support Ohioans that were transitioning from Apple Creek State Institute to community life. The existing program was unsuccessful, resulting in a high percentage of homelessness. Senator and I were volunteers at Apple Creek at the time and shared concerns regarding the deinstitutionalization process. Thanks to efforts of the Ohio Senate, on February 27, 1976, we welcomed 2 individuals from Apple Creek into a shared living home on Ardmore Ave. Akron. And, on March 1, 1977, Ohio's first independent living program started with the generous assistance of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity of Akron.

Forty years later, thousands of Ohioans have transitioned to individual living programs from institutions and group homes. **Summit County reports that 856 individuals are today involved in independent living programs a possible annual savings of \$49,220,000. Stark County reports that 566 individuals are supported through independent living with a possible annual savings \$29,715,000.** That's a total annual saving of \$78,935,000 in just two Counties. These savings estimates are based on the cost differences of the lowest level group home (1 EE per shift) vs the highest annual rate available through Medicaid for independent living services.

Director Sears provided testimony to the Senate on April 27. She reported that Ohio is saving "\$2.4 million per month by shifting utilization from nursing facilities

to community based services”. Further, ODM reported on March 16, 2017 that Ohio’s Centers for Independent Living account for 23% of all transitions from nursing homes and ICFs since 2008. CILS have transitioned 2190 individuals to the community. And our work doesn’t stop there. We work hard to keep folks in the community. Based on Medicaid cost estimates, Ohioans save \$44,000/year when someone is supported in the community vs. a nursing home. **The CILs have helped save taxpayers \$96,360,000/year through adult transitions to the community.** These figures do not include the savings created by the CIL’s supporting an additional 15,000+, perhaps an additional **\$660,000,000 annually.** Tri-County is working to transition 25 more individuals today and other Centers are doing the same.

Poverty, housing, jobs and transportation are among the biggest challenges that we hear about from individuals with disabilities. We collaborate with many organizations and agencies to tackle these issues. We are actively involved in job development, job coaching, pre-employment services and transportation services working with OOD, DODD, County Boards of DD, Direction Home, CCD, Ardmore, University of Akron, City of Akron, Alpha Phi Alpha Homes and other housing providers, Public Housing Authorities, Job and Family Services, Ohio Means Jobs, TANF, and many others.

Developing jobs is one of the most exciting things we do today. Again, it involves a lot of time and work, as it would for anyone. We recently developed 4 internships for youth involved in the TANF Youth Summer Jobs Program. We will also serve as coaches again this year. A young man I coached last summer, who happens to utilize a wheel chair, is now a highly successful Target employee, thanks to the TANF summer program.

We are an agency led by individuals with disabilities for the benefit of anyone with a disability and considered an “honest broker”.

Thank you for your time.