

Kelly Buckland
Executive Director
National Council on Independent Living

NCIL Testimony to the House Appropriations Subcommittee

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Kelly Buckland and I am the Executive Director of the National Council on Independent Living and it is my honor to appear before you today on behalf of the nation's Centers for Independent Living. I would like to start by thanking you for your commitment to enabling people with disabilities to participate fully in their communities by investing in the Independent Living Program.

Today, I appear before your Subcommittee to ask that you reaffirm your commitment to more than 57 million Americans with disabilities by increasing funding for Centers for Independent Living (CILs) by \$200 million, for a total of \$306 million for the Independent Living line item in FY 2016. NCIL is dedicated to increasing the availability of the invaluable and extremely cost-effective services Centers for Independent Living provide. NCIL is the oldest cross-disability, national grassroots organization run by and for people with disabilities. NCIL's membership includes people with disabilities, Centers for Independent Living, Statewide Independent living Councils, and other disability rights organizations. NCIL advances independent living and the rights of people with disabilities. NCIL envisions a world in which people with disabilities are valued equally and participate fully.

Centers for Independent Living are non-residential, community-based, non-profit organizations that are designed and operated by individuals with disabilities and provide five core services: advocacy, information and referral, peer support, independent living skills training and transition services that facilitate the transition of individuals with significant disabilities from nursing homes and other institutions to home and community-based residences with appropriate supports and services. Also included are assistance to individuals with significant disabilities

who are at risk of entering institutions so that the individuals may remain in the community, and the transition of youth who are individuals with significant disabilities to postsecondary life.

CILs are unique in that they operate according to a strict philosophy of consumer control, in which people with any type of disability, including people with mental, physical, sensory, cognitive, and developmental disabilities, of any age, directly govern and staff the Center. Each of the 356 federally funded Centers are unique because they are run by people with disabilities and reflect the best interest of each community individually.

Centers for Independent Living address discrimination and barriers that exist in society through direct advocacy. These barriers are sometimes architectural, but more often reflect attitudes and prejudices that have been reinforced for generations. They have deterred people with disabilities from working, leaving many in poverty and unjustly detained in institutions. As my own life experience has proven, with increased opportunities, individuals with disabilities can claim their civil rights and participate in their communities in ways their non-disabled counterparts often take for granted.

NCIL estimates that to meet the current demand- including the addition of a fifth core service as authorized by WIOA- and overcome years of devastating funding cuts, appropriations for the IL Program will need to increase by \$200 million. In FY 2010 funding for the IL Program was \$103,716,000, and in FY 2015 funding for the IL Program is \$100,932,487. That equals a loss of \$2,783,573, not including adjusting for inflation. Increased funding should be reinvested from the billions currently spent to keep people with disabilities in costly Medicaid nursing homes and institutions and out of mainstream of society.

According to data collected by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, during Fiscal Years 2012-2014, Centers for Independent Living:

- Attracted over \$2.26 Billion through private, state, local, and other sources;
- Moved 13,030 people out of nursing homes and institutions, saving states and the Federal government over \$500 million, not to mention improving people's quality of life, and;
- Provided the four core services, including: advocacy to 233,230 consumers, information and referral to 4,189,922 consumers, peer support to 172,287 consumers, and independent living skills training to 274,991 consumers.

In that same period, Centers provided other services to hundreds of thousands of individuals with disabilities in their respective communities that included:

- Services to 35,137 youth with disabilities;
- Assistance to 145,937 people in securing accessible, affordable, and integrated housing;
- Transportation services to 103,175 people with disabilities;
- Personal assistance services to 184,240 people with disabilities;
- Vocational and employment services to 96,492 people with disabilities; and
- Assistance with Assistive Technology for 171,441 people with disabilities.

Beyond the direct services they provide, CILs seek ways to broadly change traditional service delivery in their communities and throughout the nation, including reform of the long-term care system. For over 40 years, Centers for Independent Living have sought community-based programs to assist people with all types of disabilities, across the lifespan, to remain in or return to their family and friends, in their homes and communities. When such services are delivered in an individual's home, rather than a costly nursing facility or other institution, the result is tremendous cost savings to Medicaid, Medicare and states, while enabling people with disabilities to become more independent, financially self-sufficient, and less reliant on long term

government supports. And research has found that community-based services are significantly less expensive than nursing home placements.

In 2014 alone, CILs have had major successes in increasing access for people with disabilities. In my home state of Idaho, Living Independence Network Corporation in Boise helped 190 individuals access no cost assistive technology and medical equipment, helping them remain independent in their communities. The Independence Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado led a coalition that resulted in an increase of \$471,000 to the City's transit services budget. Access Living, in Chicago launched the Home and Community Ombudsman Program, where advocates assist individuals with disabilities with matters related to benefits and rights, and the program has already helped Illinoisans get their benefits reinstated, retrieve security deposits from landlords, and secure in-home services to prevent nursing home placement. The Center for Accessible Living in Louisville celebrated the completion of the 100th ramp built with volunteers from Ford and UAW Local 862, who have been building ramps for Kentucky residents since 2012. The Vermont Statewide Independent Living Council published a comprehensive k-12 online curriculum that promotes inclusion for students with disabilities in Vermont schools. This curriculum meets national and state standards and is available to Vermont teachers and students free of charge. And Arizona Bridge to Independent Living in Phoenix collaborated with Arizona Center for Disability Law to host the 4th Annual African American Symposium on Disabilities, which included an estimated 200 participants and 35 vendors.

Additionally, CILs have been extremely effective in helping people remain in or transition back into the community. REACH Resource Centers on Independent Living in Fort Worth, Dallas, Denton & Plano, transitioned 25 nursing homes residents into community living saving the State of Texas and federal government approximately \$1,180,000, while the Center

for Independent Living Options in Cincinnati, Ohio accepted their 800th consumer in the HOME Choice program, which assists people with disabilities transition from nursing facilities back to community based living. Access II Independent Living Center in Gallatin, Missouri provided Consumer Directed Services for 134 individuals with disabilities, keeping them at home and in their communities and saving the state \$6,365,400.

As I previously mentioned, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act created a fifth core service for Centers: transition. NCIL strongly supported the addition of this fifth core service, but additional funding is sorely needed to effectively carry it out. Funding these transition services will be critical to promoting effective employment outcomes, successful nursing home transition, and increased community participation for transitioning students.

Current funding levels barely sustain day-to-day operations. Centers struggle to meet the demands of the community and provide leadership and common sense solutions. Without increased funds our vision to achieve full integration of people with disabilities in society will be undercut and taxpayers will continue to pay for costly Medicaid nursing homes and bear the economic impact of negative employment outcomes and continued dependence on programs that disincentivize work and community involvement. Centers for Independent Living are an excellent service and a bargain for America. They keep people active and engaged in their communities, and they save taxpayer money.

Thank you again for this opportunity, Mr. Chairman and Subcommittee members. We will follow up with each of you to invite you to visit your local Center for Independent Living so you can see first-hand their contributions to your Congressional Districts. We look forward to working with you to ensure that Americans with disabilities have the opportunity become active members of society.