Name

Title

Institutional Affiliation (if any)

I am writing to support the National Council on Independent Living’s request for Congress to reaffirm your commitment to the more than 57 million Americans disabilities by increasing funding in the HHS appropriations for Centers for Independent Living (CILs). I am asking that you increase funding by $200 million, for a total of $301 million for the Independent Living line item in FY 2017.

CILs are cross-disability, non-residential, community-based, nonprofit organizations that are designed and operated by individuals with disabilities. CILs are unique in that they are directly governed and staffed by people with all types of disabilities, including people with mental, physical, sensory, cognitive, and developmental disabilities. Each of the 365 federally funded centers provides five core services: information and referral, individual and systems advocacy, peer support, independent living skills training, and transition services, which were added with the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). From 2012-2014, CILs provided the core services to nearly 5 million people with disabilities, and provided additional services such as housing assistance, transportation, personal care attendants, and employment services to hundreds of thousands of individuals. During this same period, prior to transition being added as a core service, CILs transitioned 13,030 people with disabilities from nursing homes and other institutions into the community.

Transition services were added as a fifth core service with the 2014 reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act within the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Transition services include the transition of individuals with significant disabilities from nursing homes and other institutions to home and community-based residences with appropriate supports and services, assistance to individuals with significant disabilities at risk of entering institutions to remain in the community, and the transition of youth with significant disabilities to postsecondary life. This core service is vital to achieving full participation for people with disabilities.

Every day, CILs are fighting to ensure that people with disabilities gain and maintain control over our own lives. We know that this cannot occur when people reside in institutional settings. Opponents of deinstitutionalization say that allowing people with disabilities to live in the community will result in harm. We know that the 13,030 people with disabilities who CILs successfully transitioned out of nursing homes and institutions from 2012-2014 prove otherwise. Additionally, when services are delivered in an individual’s home, the result is a tremendous cost savings to Medicaid, Medicare, and states. Community-based services enable people with disabilities to become less reliant on long-term government supports, and they are significantly less expensive than nursing home placements. We are grateful that Congress demonstrated their understanding and support for community-based services when WIOA was passed and transition was added as a fifth core service.

Since transition services were added as a core service, the need for funding is critical. Moreover, CILs need additional funding to restore the devastating cuts to the Independent Living program, make up for inflation costs, and address the increased demand for independent living services. In 2016, the Independent Living Program is receiving $2.5 million less in funding than it was in 2010. It is simply not possible to meet the increasing demand for services and effectively provide transition services without additional funding. 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 society.

Centers for Independent Living play a crucial role in the lives of people with disabilities, and work tirelessly to ensure that people with disabilities have a real choice in where and how they live, work, and participate in the community. Additionally, CILs are an excellent service and a bargain for America, keeping people engaged with their communities and saving taxpayer money. NCIL is dedicated to increasing the availability of the invaluable and extremely cost-effective services CILs provide, and they have submitted written testimony with a similar request. I strongly support NCIL’s testimony.