

SB608 FAVORABLE

Good afternoon –esteemed members of the Finance Committee

My name is Laurie Elinoff. I am a constituent of District 31 and I am a PPWD-Proud Person with a Disability. For more than 15 years, I have served in some capacity on the Governor-appointed Maryland Statewide Independent Living Council. I have served as both a Council member and a passionate volunteer.

Today I urge you to vote yes for House Senate Bill 608, which puts the Statewide Independent living Council(SILC) in statute. This will allow for true compliance with federal assurances and regulations to act as an independent agency of the government.

To appreciate the utmost importance and value of this legislation you must first appreciate the birth of the independent living movement and centers for independent living. The independent living movement began with a person with significant disabilities, Ed Roberts. Ed came down with polio as a teenager just before the Salk vaccine was discovered. As a result, his limitations were so significant that the California Division of Vocational Rehabilitation deemed him too severe to go to college and eventually work. Ed Roberts fought

this rejection through his advocacy and won. Not only was he the first person with a severe disability to go to UC Berkley, he would eventually become employed as the California Director of Vocational Rehabilitation-the very agency that rejected him years before.

Ed's greatest legacy is in being one of the creators of the very first center for independent living in Berkley California. This was a center that continued the work that Ed Roberts and the rolling quads started on the college campus. The CIL-Center for independent living- would be the first of hundreds around the country , centers run by and for people with disabilities; Centers that offer services that result in people with disabilities making decisions for themselves on how to live their best lives.

The Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) is a Governor appointed Council. The Council and Maryland's seven centers work together to strengthen independent living services in Maryland. The law requires that the Centers and the Council develop, execute and evaluate a three year State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) to best provide the five core independent living services to Marylanders with disabilities.

The seven centers for independent living (CILS) are operated by and for people with disabilities and they serve Marylanders all over the state. They receive over 2 million dollars in federal funding. In order to continue receiving this funding, they must

have a Statewide Independent Living Council-a SILC, that operates separately from any state agency.

Currently the SILC receives \$139,000 in Federal Funding through MSDE-DORS which acts as the designated state entity.

Right now, the SILC is not a free standing entity. Thus it is not able to receive and expend funds for its own employees. Instead it must use a government agency, DORS, to expend funds, hire personnel and to carry out the work of the Council. In fact, this has prevented the Maryland SILC from hiring a much needed Executive Director. This situation does not allow for the independence outlined in Federal Assurances from the Administration for Community Living.

A skilled Executive Director is critical to so many things

Critical to committee work-taking minutes and following up on action steps

Critical to inspiring new Council volunteers

Critical to building a foundation of unification for Maryland IL partners. The independent living partners are The Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)

Critical to carrying forward a strong legacy and leading the Council into the future and so much more

I will conclude by urging you to follow the wise example of the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Hawaii, Indiana, Kansas, Maine, North Carolina, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas and Wisconsin. Please vote to put the Maryland Statewide Independent Living Council in statute which will allow for compliance with federal assurances and regulations to act as an independent agency of government. Please vote yes on Senate Bill 608. Thank you.