

## **Testimony in Support of HB 851**

TO: The Honorable Vanessa Atterbeary, Chair, and Members of the Maryland House Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Adama Bangura, Maryland SILC, Disability Advocate

BILL: HB 851 – Human Services – Maryland Statewide Independent Living Council – Legal Status

POSITION: SUPPORT

DATE: February 19th, 2026

### Introduction

Madam Chair and members of the Committee,

My name is Adama Bangura, and I am a dedicated disability rights advocate who has worked directly with individuals and families navigating systems that too often create barriers instead of opportunities. I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 851.

For years, I have witnessed firsthand how policy clarity or the lack of it can determine whether services are delivered efficiently or delayed unnecessarily. HB 851 is about clarity, stability, and protecting the infrastructure that supports Marylanders with disabilities.

### Why This Bill Matters

The Maryland Statewide Independent Living Council (MSILC) plays a critical role in shaping and monitoring Maryland's independent living services. It works alongside Centers for Independent Living to ensure people with disabilities can live independently, participate fully in their communities, and exercise their civil rights.

HB 851 strengthens this mission by formally defining the Council as a tax-exempt body politic and corporate. While MSILC has operated since 1993, codifying this legal status in Maryland law ensures:

- Administrative Authority and Efficiency – The Council will have clear statutory authority to enter contracts, manage funds, and conduct its corporate affairs without ambiguity.
- Financial Protection and Integrity – Explicit tax-exempt recognition safeguards critical funding so resources are directed to advocacy, planning, and oversight — not diverted due to technical uncertainties.
- Federal Compliance and Stability – The Council’s role as an instrumentality of the State, as required under the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, will be strengthened and protected.

This bill does not create new bureaucracy. It protects existing infrastructure that ensures accountability and independence in our statewide disability services system.

### Why This Is Personal

As someone deeply engaged in disability rights work, I have seen how Independent Living principles transform lives. When systems function properly, individuals with disabilities gain employment, secure accessible housing, advocate for themselves, and live with dignity.

When systems are unclear or unstable, the community suffers.

HB 851 ensures that MSILC can focus fully on strategic planning, systems advocacy, and oversight, rather than navigating legal gray areas. It sends a powerful message that Maryland values both independence and institutional stability in its disability services framework.

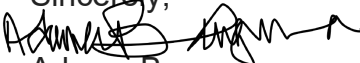
### Conclusion

HB 851 is a common-sense, fiscally responsible measure that strengthens governance, protects public resources, and reinforces Maryland’s commitment to disability rights.

As an advocate who works daily to ensure fairness, access, and dignity for people with disabilities, I respectfully ask for a favorable report on HB 851.

Thank you for your leadership and your continued commitment to Maryland's disability community.

Sincerely,



Adama Bangura