



**Independent Marylanders Achieving Growth
Through Empowerment**

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Testimony of

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Independent Marylanders Achieving Growth Through Empowerment

Before the

Maryland House Ways and Means Committee

On HB0851

Subject: HB0851

Establishing the Legal Framework for the State Independent Living Council (SILC)

Informational

February 19, 2026

Madam Chair and members of the Committee,

Opening Statement

Good afternoon, Chair Jheanelle K. Wilkins and members of the Ways and Means Committee. My name is Stephanie Schwartz, and I serve as the Deputy Director of The IMAGE Center for People with Disabilities, a Center for Independent Living (CIL) run by and for people with disabilities. I am here to provide supporting information regarding HB0851.

The Strength of the Network

Under Section 7-1002(b)(1) of our state code, CILs are mandated to work in close coordination with the State Independent Living Council (SILC). This isn't just a suggestion; it is the blueprint for how we deliver services.

However, a network is only as strong as its anchor. Currently, our SILC operates under a "vague" legal status that creates unnecessary friction. For the CILs to succeed in our mission, we need a partner with a firm, unambiguous legal foundation. When the SILC is structurally sound, the entire Independent Living Network is empowered to serve our consumers more effectively.

Protecting the State Plan (SPIL)

The SILC is the primary architect of the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL). The SPIL determines how federal and state resources are allocated to help Marylanders with disabilities live autonomously.

From a pragmatic standpoint, when a SILC is bogged down by administrative or legal questions regarding its status, the SPIL suffers. We cannot afford delays in implementation because of "red tape" or structural ambiguity. HB0851 ensures the SILC can spend 100% of its energy on service strategy rather than defending its right to exist or its procedural standing.

Stability for Our Community and Partners

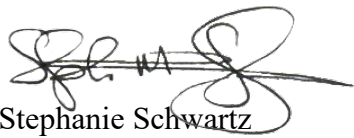
Finally, this bill is about professionalism and permanence. Our disability community—and the external vendors we work with—need to know that the institutions representing them are stable.

Establishing a clear legal status, signals to stakeholders that the SILC is a permanent, professional institution. It provides the fiscal and administrative certainty required to manage long-term projects and build trust with the people we serve.

Conclusion

HB0851 is a foundational necessity providing the clarity we need to move from asking "How are we structured?" to "How can we better serve our citizens?"

I respectfully provide this information as a favorable recommendation for HB0851. Thank you for your time and your commitment to the independence of all Marylanders.



Stephanie Schwartz
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The IMAGE Center of Maryland