



Independent Marylanders Achieving Growth Through Empowerment
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Testimony of

Teara Winmond
Executive Director
Independent Marylanders Achieving Growth Through Empowerment

Before the
Maryland House Ways and Means Committee
On HB 851

Informational
February 19, 2026

Madam Chair and members of the Committee,

My name is Teara Winmond, I am the Executive Director of Independent Marylanders Achieving Growth Through Empowerment (The IMAGE Center of Maryland). We support independent living for people with disabilities in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Harford County. I also serve as the Center for Independent Living (CIL) representative on the Maryland Statewide Center for Independent Living Council (Maryland-SILC). I am testifying before you today to provide information on HB 851 and the effect that it can have on the Maryland-SILC and CILs and our ability to effectively support Marylanders with disabilities.

The Maryland Statewide Independent Living Council (Maryland-SILC) performs a vital role in our state, working alongside Centers for Independent Living to ensure that Marylanders with disabilities have the resources to live autonomously and with dignity within their chosen community. Maryland-SILC supports regional centers with statewide initiatives.

The problem

The current allocation of the Maryland-SILC leaves the legal status as ambiguous and does not make clear what is allowed under the current allocation.

The solution

HB 851 provides essential clarification by defining the Council as a tax-exempt body politic and corporate. While the Council has existed since 1993, formalizing this legal status in the Maryland Code ensures:

Administrative Efficiency by removing ambiguity regarding the Council's ability to enter into contracts and manage its own corporate affairs,

Financial Integrity by explicitly stating its tax-exempt status protects the funding meant for programs and advocacy rather than administrative overhead.

Alignment with Federal Law: It strengthens the Council's standing as an instrumentality of the State, as required by the federal Rehabilitation Act.

In my experience, the Maryland-SILC plays an integral role in providing statewide initiatives to raise awareness for independent living across Maryland. Redefining the Council as a tax-exempt body politic and corporate will allow access to funding like grants, private foundations, corporations and government entities. More diverse funding streams means that the council will have additional resources to support independent living in Maryland. A non-profit status will provide tax exemption status, so more funding is dedicated to programming. Ensuring the Maryland-SILC has a firm legal foundation as a non-profit, allows them to focus 100% of their energy on supporting independent living initiatives."

Conclusion

In conclusion, this bill is a request for a practical and sound change that, if approved, will provide the Maryland Statewide Independent Living Council with the legal foundation to remain focused on its mission to support Marylanders with disabilities to continue to advocate for independence and dignity.

Thank you for your time and for your support of the disability community.
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Teara Winmond', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Teara Winmond
Executive Director
The IMAGE Center of Maryland