

ANDRÉ JACQUE

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*Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Aging and Long-Term Care
State Senator André Jacque
November 16, 2021*

Good Morning Chairman Gundrum and Members of the Committee,

Senator Jacque regrets that he is not able to testify in person at today's hearing.

Wisconsin's Independent Living Centers (ILCs) are the only consumer-based, community based, not-for-profit, nonresidential organizations serving persons of any age, and with any type of disability in all 72 counties. Unique in the world of human services, ILCs are governed and operated by board and staff composed of a majority of people with disabilities. ILCs are a great investment, as they provide assistance to people with disabilities and older adults to access employment, transportation, housing and maintain/attain independence and health. These cost effective services contribute to keeping people out of costly institutions and nursing facilities (an average savings of 30% per person).

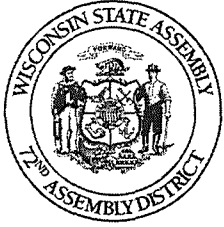
Wisconsin's 8 ILCs (as defined in state statute 46.96/federal WIOA/Sec.482 CENTERS) now have 3 additional services that they are required to provide: 1) transition of people from institutions to the community; 2) providing services to people who are at risk of entering institutions; 3) and facilitating the transition of youth with disabilities to postsecondary life. The current state of funding commitment does not address these additional services.

The 8 ILCs that serve all of Wisconsin have received no increase in state funding for 20 years, despite the increased operating costs each year. ILCs have all seen significantly increased requests for services. The average increase in requests for just core services is 229% over the last 20 years.

Wisconsin's ILCs are being asked to provide more services, for more people, and these requirements necessitate additional funding to be sustainable. Wisconsin's State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL), approved by DHS and the federal Administration on Community Living states the annual amount of funding needed to adequately provide independent living services statewide is \$5,220,000. However, the current funding is \$2,850,296. Therefore, an additional \$2,343,100 of state funding is needed to meet the statewide service requirements, and would be provided by AB175.

The identical Senate companion bill passed the Senate Human Services, Children and Families Committee earlier this session on a unanimous bipartisan 5-0 vote.

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 175.



SCOTT KRUG

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 72nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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Rep.Krug@legis.wi.gov

TO: Assembly Committee on Aging and Long-Term Care
FROM: Representative Scott Krug
RE: Testimony on Assembly Bill 175
DATE: November 16, 2021

Thank you Chairman Gundrum and committee members for hearing my testimony in support of Assembly Bill (AB 175).

AB 175 would provide additional funding to the state's Independent Living Centers or ILCs. I know many of us are familiar with the ILCs. Independent living centers in Wisconsin are consumer-controlled, community-based, cross-disability, nonresidential private agencies. They are non-profit, and are designed and operated within a local community by individuals with disabilities.

ILCs provide an array of independent living services including core services, which include information and referral; skills training for independent living; peer support; and advocacy for individuals and for systems. ILCs also provide services that facilitate transition from nursing homes and other institutions to the community, they provide assistance to those at risk of entering institutions, and they facilitate transition of youth to postsecondary life.

ILCs may in addition offer a host of other services such as counseling, assistance in finding housing; personal assistance services; transportation referrals and assistance; physical therapy and mobility training; rehabilitation technology; and recreation.

ILCs are organized geographically. There are eight regional, multi-county ILCs in Wisconsin. My entire district lies within the Midstate Independent Living Choices ILC and I know that Midate has done a lot of good for many of my constituents.

ILCs offer and deliver support to those with disabilities support to their clients by offering them an opportunity to maintain independence when that may be difficult or impossible on their own. Through encouraging and facilitating good health, helping to identify employment opportunities and working to find housing and transportation solutions, ILCs are helping to

MORE

move our communities forward.

In helping keep people in their homes, ILCs are able help us keep costs down. It is generally more cost-effective to retain people in their own homes, their own apartments, than to place them in residential care. Remaining in the home is usually what clients want as well. ILCs help meet state needs and personal needs as they perform their mission.

However, the needs of our ILCs in Wisconsin are growing, and the eight ILCs that serve our state have not seen an increase in funding from the state for 20 years.

AB 175 would increase funding for the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) to make grants to ILCs to perform their work. Under current law, DHS makes grants to ILCs. The current Wisconsin State Plan for Independent Living has these grants set at \$2.8 million annually.

AB 175 would increase the amount by \$2.3 million annually. The amount is substantial. So, however, is the need also substantial. It is estimated that this increase is the amount needed for the ILCs to meet the demand they face for their services.

Please note that in its fiscal estimate on AB 175, DHS states that it can administer the increase with no additional staff or other resources needed.

Please note also that the Senate companion to AB 175 is Senate Bill 190 (SB 190), which has been recommended for passage by the Senate Committee on Human Services, Children and Families with a vote of 5-0. This recommendation was made last month.

ILCs have been credited with giving our neighbors, friends and fellow Wisconsinites with tremendous opportunities, but they need help. AB 175 provides the help and resources needed to make a meaningful difference.

Thank you to Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources, Access to Independence, The Arc for Wisconsin and Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers for your support on this bill.

Thank you for taking my testimony. Please join me in supporting Assembly Bill 175.

options

for independent living^{inc}

••• Taking control of tomorrow •••

To: Assembly Committee on Aging and Long Term Care

From: Sandy Popp, Assistant Director, Options for Independent Living
920-393-1043

Date: Tuesday, November 16, 2021

Re: Support of AB 175 – Statewide Increase for Independent Living Centers

Dear Committee Members,

I am here today to ask for your support of Assembly Bill 175, which allows an increase in state funding for Wisconsin Independent Living Centers (ILCs). You have heard background on what services Independent Living Centers provide, the money we save the state as a result of those services, and the fact that there has not been an increase in our funding to provide those services despite the addition of the three core services.

For Options specifically, we cover 17 counties, many of which are underserved. This includes Brown County which is represented by Rep. Shelton. The 2010 census for our service area is 1.2 million, and of those, 136,000 people with disabilities. Options serves about 3000 consumers a year with information and referral and direct services, which is a far cry from what we could be doing with additional funding. We do not have the funds for appropriate outreach, or for the staff we would need to cover all areas if outreach were provided and more consumers started calling. We do the best we can in our service area, but it is inadequate for consumers with disabilities who could benefit from our services.

Now let me tell you about the importance of those services for a person with a disability as someone who experienced them first hand...I would not be where I am today without the services provided to me at an ILC. I came to Green Bay when I was 26. I had been diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis at the age of 19 and soon felt and saw the debilitating effects of the disease. After many years of living with my parents and having them care for me, I knew it was time to move on and move out to be become more independent.

I used a scooter at that time so I knew I needed a place to live that was accessible. On a referral from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation I met with an Options staff. They were able to work with me to locate an accessible apartment. After I moved into Green Bay, Options asked me to volunteer for them and I did. Within a year I started a DVR work program at Options, and then I was hired by Options a year later.



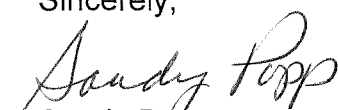
The services Options provided me not only included housing location, but also peer support, which was invaluable. I was actually working at Options with people who had disabilities who were confident, independent and self-supporting! This was very important for building back my self-confidence. I started out very part-time and worked my way up to full-time. As a result, I was able to discontinue my SSI and housing benefits. I am now the Assistant Director at Options. Granted Options would not be able to hire every consumer with a disability, but the support I received from Options definitely put me on the path to independence.

Over the 32 years I have been at Options I have seen individuals with disabilities become more independent and self-sufficient as a result of IL services. That is what Independent Living Centers are all about...empowering people with disabilities to lead independent and productive lives in their communities! And unlike many non-profit organizations in the state who work with individuals with disabilities, ILC's are mandated to have over half of our staff and Board as people with disabilities. Why? Because working with someone with a disability adds that valuable peer component and credibility many people need to see. As with me, when you see someone who has faced a barrier and moved forward, it shows you can too!

To quote Rep. Macco when he toured Options just before COVID started, "You are not working to give people a hand out, but a hand up." And that is what we are doing. In order to support people with disabilities in Wisconsin with our services, especially in our rural areas, we need additional funding. The costs of continuing our services has risen, i.e., wages, employee benefits, mileage reimbursements, etc. Yet, the funding we receive has stayed stagnant. I hope that you will support this request for funding to assist Wisconsin Independent Living Centers in empowering people with disabilities, and at the same time, save Wisconsin money.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Sandy Popp

Assistant Director

Direct Line - 920-393-1043

November 16, 2021

To: Committee on Aging and Long-Term Care

From: Karl Kopp, Executive Director
Society's Assets, 5200 Washington Ave #225, Racine, WI 53406
kkopp@societysassets.org
www.societysassets.org
(262) 637-9128 x 3600

Regarding: **Assembly Bill 175** - relating to grants to independent living centers and making an appropriation.

Society's Assets is a nonprofit agency founded in 1974 that serves southeastern Wisconsin and the counties are: Kenosha, Racine, Jefferson, Walworth and Rock. We are part of the Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers (WCILC). There are eight (8) Independent Living Centers (ILCs) in Wisconsin's seventy-two (72) counties. The ILC's provide services, supports, and systems advocacy for people of any age or disability.

As you know **Assembly Bill 175** supports:

- 1) facilitating the transition of individuals with significant disabilities from institutions to home and community-based residences;
- 2) providing assistance to individuals with significant disabilities who are at risk of entering institutions so that the individuals may remain in the community; and
- 3) facilitating the transition of youth who have significant disabilities to postsecondary life.

Why this is important?

A story pertaining to #1

There is a woman; we will call "Jane", who is in a nursing home. Jane called us asking for help. She requested to go back home to live with her disabled son, and disabled mother. After meeting with Jane, we have taken the lead role in coordinating with all the healthcare stakeholders the transition to have Jane leave the nursing home. The home she wanted to transition to needed some modifications. The property owner was more than willing to allow things like the widening of a doorway 4 inches. The cost to be in the nursing home was about \$9,000 month. Jane needed to be back in her own home to help care for her son and mother who were disabled. Jane had another son who would support her as a caregiver.

A story pertaining to #'s 2 and 3

As the Executive Director at Society's Assets, I am thankful for the history of this agency. The story bears repeating. Society's Assets Founder, Dan Johnson, was born Christmas day 1947. He lived with his parents and sisters outside of Racine, Wisconsin. As a high school freshman, Dan played football and was a member of the wrestling team. On November 22nd, 1963 President John F. Kennedy's was assassinated. The entire country was in shock. However, the decision by Dan's wrestling team to meet that Saturday for practice that would change Dan's life forever.

(side 1 of 2 – see backside)

During practice, Dan's wrestling partner came in low. As Dan attempted to jump over him, his legs tangled, and he landed hard between the mats. At that moment, Dan could not move or feel his legs. He had fractured his vertebrae and damaged his spinal cord. He was paralyzed and would not walk again. He would require a wheelchair for mobility and dependence on others for all of his daily activities; bathing, dressing, toileting, and transfers.

In the 1960s, there were few services available for families with a disabled member. Dan's family struggled both financially and emotionally. His parents used the time that Dan was in rehabilitation to modify their house so their son could return home.

After high school graduation, Dan attended the University of Wisconsin–Parkside. Dan's first job was as a manager trainee, and was able to purchase his first home in Racine at the age of 25. Dan made it his life's work to advocate for people with disabilities and to ensure they have access to all opportunities the same as any other person. Dan had many professional accomplishments including: **Founding Society's Assets, one of the first independent living centers (ILCs) in the state; and 36 years of employment at the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.** Among his many accomplishments, he and his wife were foster and adoptive parents. He passed away in March 2017. His accomplishments and success was due in part to the support of family and friends. Without that, it could have been a much different story. Imagine if after his injury, he was placed in an institutional setting. **The cost to the State over 57 years would have been estimated at \$3 to \$4 million.**

Wisconsin has seen a population growth from 5 million to about 6 million residents over the last 20 years. CDC reports 1 in 4 US adults live with a disability. That's 250,000 more residents in WI with a disability. Yet state funding has remained flat for ILC's during that time.

We help people get and/or stay out of institutions. For example, we have a waiting list of people who need home modifications. Based on their disability and needs, we assess their home environment and draw up a plan for the resident to "age in place" at home. Our success keeps them out of an institution, for some adults who will be on Medicaid – that's \$100,000/year in costs for a nursing home that the state doesn't need to pay.

Remember – "no money, no mission".

Thank you for considering moving forward with this important bi-partisan legislation and for protecting all individuals with disabilities in Wisconsin from not only being placed prematurely in an institutional setting but helping the transition of youth to post-secondary life.

To: Committee on Aging and Long-Term Care

Bill: Assembly Bill 175

Hello, my name is Marci Boucher and I am the President and CEO for Independence First a nonprofit organization based out of Milwaukee. We are one of eight (8) Independent Living Centers (ILCs) statewide, and there are over 450 nationwide. We exist to empower individuals with disabilities to live independently in the community through our five (5) core services. We are here today to request that you support Senate Bill 190 to increase our base funding for the eight (8) Independent Living Centers throughout the State of Wisconsin.

The ILCs are unique because they serve all disabilities and all ages. We are consumer-controlled, which means that over 50% of our staff and 50% of our Board are people with disabilities. ILCs are non-residential nonprofit organizations. We are mandated by the Federal government and Wisconsin state statute to provide the five (5) Independent Living core services; Information and Referral, Peer Support, Independent Living Skills Training, Advocacy, and our 5th core service Transition.

As you may know, in 2014 a new fifth core service was added to our mandate due to the passage of the Workforce Investment and Opportunities Act, (WIOA). This new core service has three (3) facets essentially adding three (3) additional core services; transitioning from nursing home, diversion from entering a nursing facility, and transitioning post-secondary from high school to adulthood. Our Wisconsin State statute requires that we meet the federal requirements, so since 7/21/15 we have been providing these services with no additional funding. In fact, we have not had an increase in base funding for over 20 years.

The ILCs are cost effective and a great investment as they assist people with disabilities to gain employment, maintain or attain independence, and keep people out of costly institutions and nursing homes. (30% per individual)

During the pandemic, we received CARES ACT funding to assist individuals struggling with the stay at home order. We contacted our consumers to see what was their biggest challenges were. We found out people had food insecurities and were not able to take care of their health concerns due to lack of internet and

technology. We purchased laptops and internet service, taught people how to order food online and do telehealth, stocked cupboards, provided rent and utility assistance, and diverted people from entering institutions.

One example of the great work we did over this past year is a man who contracted COVID and was in the hospital for months. He was lucky enough to survive but when it came time to go home he was not able. He, like many Americans, live paycheck to paycheck. Since he was in the hospital for an extended period, he lost everything. When you have a disability, and have no place to go when discharged, the hospital sends you to a nursing facility. Once you get into a nursing home, it is very difficult to get out. Thankfully, we had CARES Act funding and were able to get him back into an apartment, pay his security deposits, stock his cupboards with food, and purchase a few pieces of furniture. If we did not have that funding, he would now be in a nursing home.

Do you know what it is like to be in one of these nursing facilities? Well let me tell you, I had a woman named Gloria who was in a car wreck, after her hospital stay she went into a rehab facility. She called me frantic about a month ago. She told me how people were dying around her from COVID, she had food poisoning 3 times and she was getting ready to hit her 90-day mark. At 90 days, her disability check turns over to the institution who takes all of her check, but 45 dollars a month. That is why nobody can get out of a nursing facility. Thankfully, we were able to rapid transition her into an apartment and she is doing fine. However, the Cares Act funding is depleted, yet people continue to call, and we will not be able to assist any more people until additional funding is secured.

Two years ago, when we were here, I told the committee we were able to transition three (3) people the prior year, and had 22 still on the waiting list. Since then, three (3) of those have been transitioned and all the others have died.

Please support Assembly Bill 175

List of Supporting Organizations for the ILC Funding Increase (2021)

Disability Rights of Wisconsin

Board for People with Developmental Disabilities

Board on Aging and Long Term Care

Independent Living Council of Wisconsin

Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers

Access to Independence

Center for Independent Living Western Wisconsin

Independence*First*

Independent Living Resources

Midstate Independent living Choices

North Country Independent Living

Options for Independent Living

Society's Assets

The Arc of Wisconsin

Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources

Wisconsin's Independent Living Centers (ILCs)

- Three additional core services are required to be provided by ILCs as of 7/21/15 due to the passage of the Workforce Investment and Opportunities Act (WIOA). Our Wisconsin state statutes require that we meet the federal requirements. Therefore, Independent Living Centers' state and federal contracts require the 3 following additional core services without any additional funds (see WI State Statute 46.96 and federal WIOA/ SEC. 482. CENTERS).

(i) facilitate the transition of individuals with significant disabilities from nursing homes and other institutions to home and community-based residences, with the requisite supports and services;

(ii) provide assistance to individuals with significant disabilities who are at risk of entering institutions so that the individuals may remain in the community; and

(iii) facilitate the transition of youth (including students) who are individuals with significant disabilities, who were eligible for individualized education programs under section 614(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1414(d)), and who have completed their secondary education or otherwise left school, to postsecondary life, including employment.

- Wisconsin's State Plan for Independent Living (approved by DHS and ACL/HHS) includes the amount of ILCs' base funding needed at \$5,220,000 currently we are at \$2,850,296. Therefore we are requesting an additional \$2,353,100 to meet the required amount of base funding.
- ILCs are the only consumer directed organizations that provide services to all ages and all disabilities statewide.
- The ILCs are cost effective and a great investment as they assist people with disabilities to gain employment, maintain/attain independence and health, keep people out of costly institutions and

nursing homes (savings of 30% per person), and employ a majority of staff members who are people with disabilities – all of which save money.

- All 8 ILCs have received no increase in state funding for 20 years yet costs to operate increase each year. The COLA alone is estimated at over \$760,000.
- All 8 ILCs continue to experience an increase in requests for services each year. The statewide average for the increase in core services over the last 20 years is 229%.
- In summary, Wisconsin's ILCs are being asked to provide more services for more people without an increase in funding, which is unsustainable. Plus we have a new federal and state requirement to provide an additional service. Our cost to provide this additional service requires additional funding.



November 16th, 2021

Wisconsin State Assembly
Assembly Committee on Aging and Long-Term Care
Representative Gundrum, Chair
Representative Petryk, Vice Chair

Testimony in Support of AB 175

Dear Committee on Aging and Long-Term Care:

My name is Jason Beloungy, and I have the privilege of being the Executive Director of Access to Independence. I am also a person with lived experience with a mental health disability, and have been in substance use recovery for nearly five years. Access to Independence is the independent living center that serves all of Columbia, Dane, Dodge, and Green counties, which includes several villages and townships within Representative Plumer's district.

As the Executive Director of Access to Independence, and the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers (WCILC), I am here today to ask for your support for Assembly Bill 175, and I want to thank the committee for this hearing today.

The independent living network in Wisconsin is a tremendous resource for all people with disabilities, and those of any age. Through the testimony provided today, you have heard about the value of our eight centers as the only consumer-controlled organizations that cover the entire state of Wisconsin. Being cross-disability, and consumer-run, is impressive, but what's as impressive is the array of quality services that we consistently provide throughout our great state.

Since you have had the opportunity to hear examples of the impact our work has on people's lives, I would like to briefly talk about the impact our network has on the *communities* served across the state. Independent living centers in Wisconsin provide a range of community-impact services such as collaboration, education, systemic advocacy, outreach, and technical assistance. For example, Access to Independence provided technical assistance to several Madison Public Library branches to assist them in improving the accessibility of their meeting spaces, and self-service amenities. Access to Independence has also taken a lead role in supporting organizers to make their festivals and events more accessible and inclusive to attendees with disabilities.

OVER

PHONE: 608.242.8484 Email: info@accesstoind.org Website: www.accesstoind.org



PSC
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ACCESS TO INDEPENDENCE INC.

3810 Milwaukee Street Madison, WI 53714

Over the course of the last year, Wisconsin's independent living centers continued to serve people with disabilities through the COVID-19 Pandemic. Statewide, over 18,000 people received information and referral services, nearly 4,000 people received independent living skills training, over 2,000 individuals with disabilities received assistance with housing, over 3,000 people received assistive technology services, and over 2,000 people with disabilities received employment services, including work incentives benefits counseling. Since I've mentioned employment, it is also worth noting that Wisconsin's eight independent living centers employ over 170 people with disabilities to provide the array of services you have heard about here today, and that includes organizational leaders, like myself. Additionally, all of our boards of directors are made up of a majority of volunteers with disabilities.

It has been over 20 years since our last increase in state funding, and the proposed increase will get all of Wisconsin's ILCs up to a base funding level of \$580,000. This increase has been in our State Plan for Independent Living for over 15 years, which receives state and federal approval. I ask that this committee, and ultimately the full legislature, pass AB 175, so that Wisconsin's independent living centers will have the resources to increase the empowerment and independence of people with disabilities throughout our state.

Thank you,

Jason J. Beloungy, Executive Director
Access to Independence, Inc.

jasonb@accesstoind.org

608-716-7266 – Direct Number

608-445-8250 – Cell Phone

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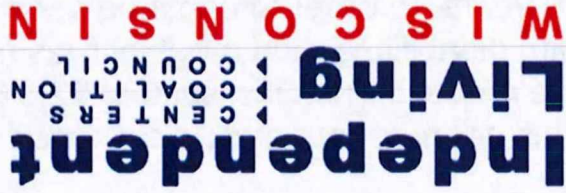
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Wisconsin's Independent Living Centers A GREAT INVESTMENT



ANY AGE

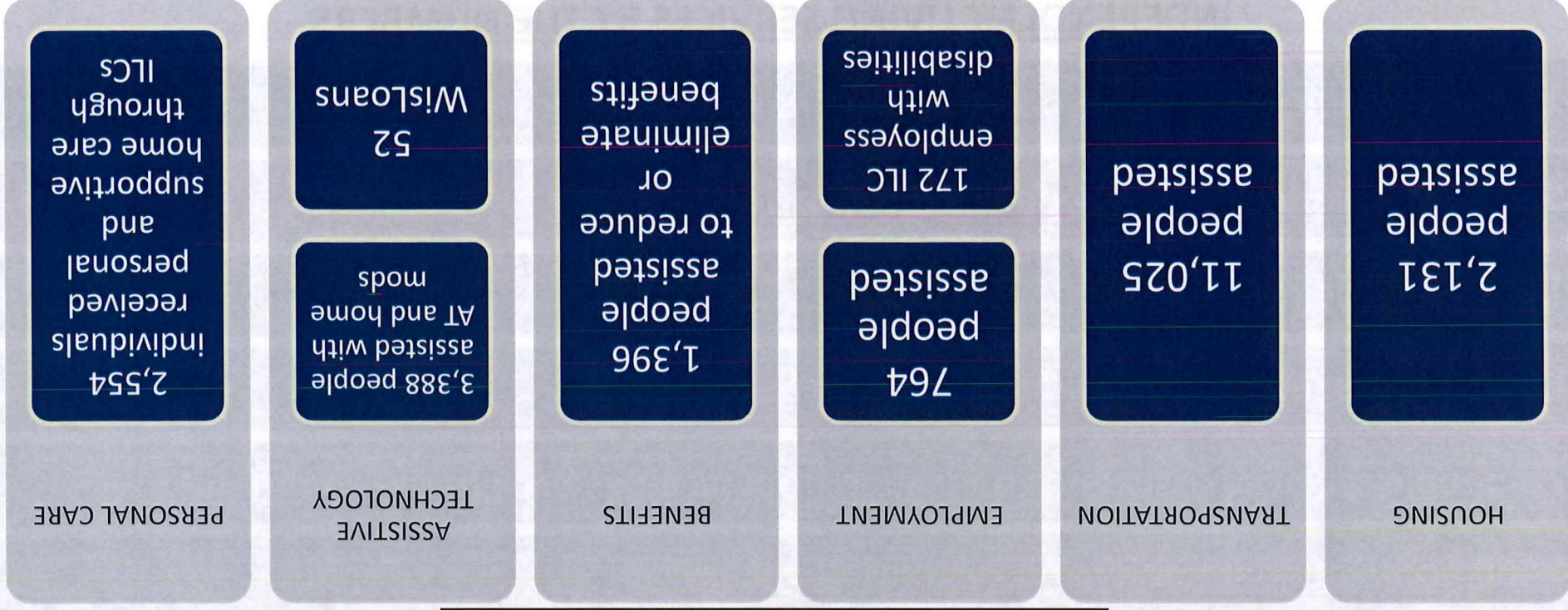
ANY DISABILITY

STATEWIDE

What Makes an Independent Living Center (ILC)?

- ILC governing boards and staff are composed of a majority of people with disabilities
- ILC services are available to people of any disability, and any age, with no income eligibility
- ILC services are provided statewide.
- ILC services are complimentary to other services including managed care organizations, IRIS Consultant Agencies, Aging and Disability Resource Centers, and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

WISCONSIN'S ILCs BY THE NUMBERS



INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES BY THE NUMBERS

18,375 people received Information and Referral Services

3,748 people received Independent Living Skills Training

1,014 people received Peer Support

1,829 people received Individual Advocacy Services

78 people received assistance relocating from facilities back to the community

4,460 hours of Community and Systems Advocacy

Funding for ILCs

Wisconsin, along with the federal government, has provided funding for Independent Living Centers for more than thirty years. However, despite a continued and increasing demand for services, the state appropriations have remained the same since 1999. Wisconsin's ILCs are serving more people, at a higher cost, with no state funding increase for over 20 years. In order to continue serving Wisconsinites with disabilities, and meet increasing demand, we are requesting an increase of \$2,343,100 annually. This will meet our state plan base funding needs.

1999 State Funding
\$1,583,500

2021 State Funding
\$1,583,500

Amount of State Funding
Needed \$2,343,100

For more information, contact Maureen Ryan at 608-444-3884, or moryan@charter.net

NORTH COUNTRY INDEPENDENT LIVING

Empowering People with Disabilities

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Serving Ashland, Bayfield,
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Sawyer and Washburn Counties

November 12, 2021

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Aging and Long-Term Care

Re: AB 175

North Country Independent Living staff consists of over 75% people with disabilities. The Board of Director's consists of over 66 % people with disabilities. Our services are provided to people with disabilities in 8 counties, including 4 tribal communities, in rural Northwestern Wisconsin.

The geography of our rural service area consistently requires an average of at least an hour's time of staff travel to meet with consumers, who are people with disabilities, to provide services. This geographical barrier poses a constraint on staff time and agency financial resources. This is just one of the financial challenges many independent living centers deal with on a daily basis. Despite these and other challenges faced in our rural service area, many consumer successes are achieved. With an increase in funding, more of these successes could be achieved on a sustainable basis.

Since July 2015, Independent Living Centers(ILC's) are federally required to provide transition services. Wisconsin statutes require that we follow these federal standards. ILC's have not received an increase in funding to provide these services. One type of transition services involves serving youth with disabilities who have completed their secondary education or otherwise left school, to transition to postsecondary life, including employment, housing and independent living.

North Country Independent Living is also involved and committed to providing services to Native Americans with disabilities in the four tribal communities that are part of our service area. These communities are located in highly rural areas. A 3-year federal demonstration grant has recently ended, making the continuation of services in these communities challenging.

Each year we strive to serve as many people with disabilities as we can within our region of Wisconsin. Unfortunately, we are not able to meet all the needs in our service area. Last we provided services to 3,459 people. As part of the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL), we also documented a total of 15,929 unserved people with disabilities in our 8 county service area, as follows: (Ashland-1,744

Bayfield-1,554 Burnett-1,659 Douglas-5,070 Iron-697 Price-1,636 Sawyer-1,806 Washburn-1,763)

A Success Story related to Post-Secondary Youth Transition:

A young man with learning and mental health disabilities, was homeless and barely finished high school but did with North Country's tutoring and guidance. With additional support, he went from couch-hopping to living with a friend in an apartment in Superior, holding a job, and advancing in that employment! With North Country's help, he regained control of his benefits and is wisely utilizing a corporate Representative Payee to do his banking and bill paying - something previously foreign to this young man.

Another Post-Secondary Youth Transition Success Story:

ILS worked with the Consumer who was 17 years old and in high school and had ADHD. Consumer was unsure what he wanted to do after he graduated. He knew he wanted to be independent, but was not sure how to do so. Consumer worked with ILS to expanded his knowledge on many topics such as independent living skills, money management, and employment. He was able learn in depth about housing, emergency preparedness, where to find resources, rights and responsibilities as a person with a disability, checking and saving accounts, paying bills, scams, SSI benefits, and preparing for employment. Throughout this process he filled out a housing application, went to speak to the landlord where he wanted to move to, and visited his bank to get information about opening his own account. Since ILS worked with this Consumer he has taken charge of his benefits and is now working to move out on his own.

A Success Story from our recent 3-Year Native American Independent Living Grant:

An Independent Living Specialist(ILS) received a call from a Consumer. The Consumer was calling from a mental health crisis bed, following a mental health crisis. The Consumer needs were multiple. Initially, the most urgent was transition from mental health crisis bed to the community as the Consumer experiences chronic homelessness. The ILS found emergency housing resources for the Consumer. The ILS worked with Consumer over several months on Peer Support, Mental Health, Housing, Social Security, and Health Care issues. The Consumer got approved for an apartment despite initial denials and the ILS worked with the Consumer to establish other health supports and needed Social Security appointments.

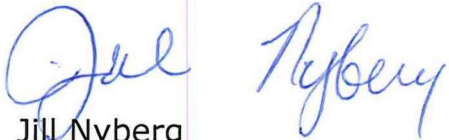
Another Native American Independent Living Success Story is:

An Independent Living Specialist (ILS) was conducting an outreach on Assistive Technology and encountered a tribal member with a disability. The individual was

having difficulty remembering when to take her medications. The ILS worked with the Consumer and Caregiver to find a system to remind and notify the Consumer when it was time to take her medications. After demo and loan of assistive technology items from North Country, the family purchased the items and have been using them successfully.

Supporting Senate Bill 567 is a smart investment for people with disabilities in the state of Wisconsin, including people in rural areas and in tribal communities. There is more work to be done. Please help us to continue doing good things with people with disabilities in northwest Wisconsin.

Respectfully Submitted,



Jill Nyberg
Executive Director
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November 16, 2021

TO: Wisconsin Assembly Committee on Aging and Long Term Care

FROM: The Center for Independent Living for Western Wisconsin, Inc. (CILWW)
Kyle Kleist, Executive Director, kleistk@cilww.com; (715) 233-1070, ext. 209

RE: Hearing to Consider Assembly Bill 175

Distinguished committee members;

CILWW is a non-profit Independent Living Center providing services in ten counties in West Central Wisconsin for the past 40 years. You will hear testimony from Directors of the other Independent Living Centers (ILC's) in Wisconsin on the need for the additional funding to allow ILC's to provide all five-core services as required under federal and state statute. This is especially true when providing the new fifth core service of transition, which requires ILC's to work with persons transitioning from institutions. This transition assistance applies not only to persons with disabilities in nursing homes, but also to person in jails and other institutions.

Let me tell you about a unique opportunity that CILWW is engaged in to work directly with persons with disabilities in transitioning from jail in Dunn County. In 2018, Dunn County received a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Justice with a goal of reducing recidivism. Dunn County developed the Jail to Community Reentry program and chose the approach of developing a mentoring program that incorporated persons with lived experience and were also trained Peer Specialists, i.e. persons who had both mental health and substance use and had been in jail. When the county released a request for proposal for agencies to contract in hiring for the Peer Specialist mentor positions, CILWW submitted a proposal that was accepted. This opportunity fits with the new fifth core service requirement of working with persons with disabilities in jails and prisons and with our current strategic plan, which included outreach to persons with disabilities involved in the criminal justice system. In 2018, CILWW worked with the Dunn County Criminal Justice Collaborating Council and Department of Human Services in hiring one fulltime and one part-time Peer Specialist. This has turned out to be a successful partnership between the Dunn County Jail, Criminal Justice Collaborating Council, Human Services and our Center.

In what we have come to call our Reentry program, the Peer Specialists have worked with over 100 self-identified individuals as having mental health and/or substance use issues. They have worked to provide participants with resources prior to and after release, mentored them on a stable recovery from substance use, and provided classes for both men and women in the jail in dealing with both addiction and trauma.

To date, over 80% of participants involved in the Reentry program have achieved their goals of working on a path toward recovery, receiving needed mental health services, and finding stable housing and employment. Currently it cost \$88.67 per day to keep a person in the Dunn County Jail. For every person the Reentry program works with, think of what a cost savings this is to the taxpayers of Dunn County and the number of persons that are no longer returning to jail and instead moving to a productive life as a taxpayer. If all the ILC's were able to do more outreach with persons with disabilities involved in the criminal justice system, think of the cost savings this would be to the State of Wisconsin. For CILWW, additional core service dollars would allow us to expand our program to surrounding counties and engaging the stakeholders in those criminal justice systems.

CILWW also operates our New Freedom transportation program that utilizes volunteer drivers to meet the needs of transit dependent persons, and has now expanded to working in 42 counties in Wisconsin. The program works collaboratively with Aging and Disability Resource Centers, Managed Care Organizations, IRIS, and other County agencies to provide much needed transportation, especially in rural areas, for medical trips, nutrition, employment, and social activities that allow persons to engage in their community. Last year, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the volunteer drivers provided over 30,000 rides. Additional State funding would allow us to hire additional staff for the program and continue to expand to other counties in Wisconsin needing assistance with providing transportation options for persons with disabilities, older adults, and other transit dependent persons.

Finally, our center has learned in 40 years of providing services to persons of all disabilities and ages, that a small investment of public resources can lead to significant and long-term savings. The center operates a Personal Services Assistance (PAS) program offering Personal Care, Supportive Home Care, and Respite services. This largely self-directed program allows individuals to remain and thrive in the community of their choice and thus avoiding high-cost institutionalization, largely borne by public taxpayer funds.

Thank you for your time today.

Kyle Kleist, Executive Director
Center for Independent Living for Western Wisconsin, Inc.

November 11th, 2021

To: Assembly Committee on Aging and Long Term Care

From: Independent Living Resources, Inc. (ILR); Sara Eckland, Executive Director,
sara.eckland@ilresources.org, 608-787-1111

Re: Support of Assembly Bill 175

Dear Committee on Aging and Long Term Care,

My name is Sara Eckland and I am the Executive Director of Independent Living Resources (ILR) in La Crosse. ILR has been providing services to people with disabilities in 13 counties in southwest Wisconsin for the past 27 years. As someone who has both provided services to people with disabilities and as someone living with a disability myself, I know well the powerful impact that Independent Living Center's can have on the lives of people that we serve and the communities in which they live. As such, I thank the committee for considering this bill.

As consumer driven organizations, Independent Living Centers work to provide the services that people with disabilities in our communities identify as areas of need. You have heard of a variety of ways so far that Wisconsin's Independent Living Centers adapt to the specific needs of the individuals in their service region. Over the course of the past decade, Independent Living Resources has received ever increasing requests to aid people with disabilities to find safe, affordable, accessible housing.

While a lack of affordable housing stock can affect people of all populations, people with disabilities can face a multitude of barriers related to their disability and life circumstances that have been affected by their disability. This could be a lack of access in their community to physically accessible housing for people with physical disabilities, being priced out of fair market housing due to having limited income, having poor or no credit due to limited income, an eviction history due to financial difficulties, etc. Many of the people that contact us for housing needs are at great risk of becoming homeless or are already unsheltered. Without the proper support, maintaining stable housing can be difficult for many people with disabilities; at the same time, people who become homeless often have an exacerbation of their health conditions, whether physical or mental health related.

Supporting individuals with locating safe, affordable and accessible housing can be provided through the core services that an Independent Living Center provides, including information and referral, independent living skills training, and advocacy. Over the course of the last decade, ILR has seen a drastic increase in the number of requests for intensive housing supports. In 2012, 13% of all Information and Referral requests that ILR received were related to housing; in 2016, that number had increased to 20%. In 2020, 46% of the requests that ILR received were for

housing assistance. Of the requests we received in 2020, over 200 of those individuals were actively homeless. Of the individuals who came to us looking for housing assistance, 80 percent of people have successfully completed a variety of goals they were working on with ILR to improve their housing situation.

It is important to note that many of the individuals who contact ILR for assistance with housing are directed to the agency by other service providers in the region, many of whom also provide housing assistance. These referrals are made to ILR because many service providers are not familiar with the barriers specific to people with disabilities or their agency is only able to provide part of the support that the individual needs. Many agencies are limited to one life area in the support they can provide- employment, economic support, health care. Many agencies also have narrow criteria for an individual qualifying for their services, leaving many people without support because they don't meet financial or functional screening criteria. Independent Living Center's (ILC's) can work with anyone in our service region who has a disability without having to meet this limiting criterion. ILC's meet people where they are with their needs and provide comprehensive assistance that has much greater flexibility than many other agencies can provide. This translates into cost savings for communities, as unstable housing or being unsheltered comes at great cost to communities both from an economic and humanistic perspective. As the need for support increases in our communities, additional IL funding would allow ILR to continue adequately providing these supports to an ever-increasing population asking for help.

I would like to share with you a success story that illustrates how the expertise that an ILC has in addressing barriers for people with disabilities can make a huge difference in their lives:

ILR received a call from an individual who was staying in a local short-term hospitalization alternative program for people who are experiencing a mental health crisis. The individual was preparing to be discharged in a few days but had moved out of their apartment the previous month and were going to be discharging to homelessness.

The staff met with the individual and helped them locate and apply for options and assistance through multiple area resources. The local homeless shelter stated that the person's needs were too high level for communal shelter living, so they needed to utilize the area's Warming Center. The individual was enrolled in a long-term care program and the Care Team worked closely with the ILR staff to work on addressing the consumer's needs. During this time the Warming Center closed for the season. Unfortunately, the individual's limited disability income greatly restricted their ability to rent fair market housing. The ILR staff advocated for the person to be admitted to the local shelter but they were once again denied due to their needs being too high. The ILR staff were able to instead work out a compromise for the local shelter to pay for a month's hotel stay.

Finally, the staff was able to connect the individual with a landlord who was willing to rent to them in spite of their limited income as long as the person could provide a "double" security deposit. The staff helped the person access the local CAP programs rapid rehousing funding that covered first month's rent and the double security deposit. The person successfully signed a lease. The staff then helped the person with finding resources for furnishing their new

apartment. Throughout this process, the ILC staff were able to help the individual with the resource system navigation necessary to help the person successfully find housing in spite of multiple barriers they experienced.

I thank you for your time today and for recognizing the vital supports that Independent Living Centers bring to communities across Wisconsin.

Thank You,

Sara Eckland

Executive Director

Independent Living Resources



November 16, 2021

TO: Assembly Committee on Aging and Long Term Care

FROM: Midstate Independent Living Choices, Inc.

Eric Riskus, eriskus@milc-inc.org, 715-344-4210

RE: Assembly Bill 175

Midstate Independent Living Choices (MILC) is a consumer- based, community based, not for profit, nonresidential organizations serving persons of any age, and with any type of disability in 11 counties. MILC is governed and operated by board and staff composed of a majority of people with disabilities.

MILC was founded in 2000, and since that time we have not seen an increase in Independent Living funding, and yet, we have been required to provide more services to more people. We have seen an increase in the number of consumers seeking our services by over 200% in 20 years, with no additional funding.

Wisconsin's 8 ILCs (as defined in state statute 46.96/federal WIOA/Sec.482 CENTERS) now have 3 additional services that they are required to provide: 1.) transition of people from institutions to the community; 2.) providing services to people who are at risk of entering institutions; 3.) and facilitating the transition of youth with disabilities to postsecondary life. The current state of funding commitment does not address these additional services.

Wisconsin's State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL), approved by DHS and the federal Administration on Community Living states the annual amount of funding needed to adequately provide independent living services statewide is \$5,220,000. However, the current funding is \$2,850,296. Therefore, an additional \$2,343,100 of state funding is needed to meet the statewide service requirements

Because of this, I am asking this committee to support Assembly Bill 175

Based on Wisconsin statistics there are over 58,661 people with a disability living in our mostly rural 11 County service area. We are only serving 2,770 people. If we had adequate funding we would be able to reach a larger number of our underserved population. Many times people have to wait to receive services from us because we are at staffing capacity. If we received adequate funding we could hire staff and provide the services that are needed. Below are a couple of examples of services we offer, that could benefit many more people with disabilities in Wisconsin.

We currently have three drop-in centers in two counties, Wood and Portage. These centers are member directed, recovery oriented environment for adults with mental health issues/illnesses and/or substance use disorders. We provide a place that offers respect, understanding, encouragement and hope for those who desire a positive community within which they can improve their lives. Members learn skills in job searching, interviewing, employment, daily living skills (i.e. cooking, cleaning, safety, budgeting, etc.), interpersonal skills, coping and social skills.

One of the top concerns currently being addressed in many counties throughout Wisconsin is that of mental health and substance abuse. One of the greatest detriments to mental health is isolation. We offer a place for people to go and have meaningful daily experiences, to break the isolation and improve their mental health. This service is free to the people who use it and is available to any adult in the area who needs help in these areas.

Monthly member evaluations are conducted to ask questions about the effectiveness of services and focus on areas such as: If members received support at our drop in centers that has helped them avoid hospital/emergency therapist visits. The results of our surveys indicated there were 98 incidences when members attended the drop in center instead of going to the hospital. The approximate savings to Wood and Portage Counties in 2019: **\$98,000** (98 visits at an average stay of \$1,000 per night for only 1 night). We believe that this is a vital part of our community; it is cost-saving for the state and directly serves people living in the area. If we had additional funding we could provide this service to many more people in other counties in our service area.

One member wrote on her survey: "I am so grateful to you. Without the safe, supportive environment MILC has provided, I would have gone in-patient so many times. Sometimes at night I get really bad flashbacks, and I think about hurting myself. But I tell myself I just need to hold on until I can go to ROCC Point. And I do hold on, and I make it another day."

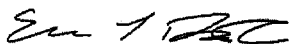
After a horrific car accident our consumer became a wheelchair user for the first time and needed help transitioning back to his home from a nursing home. He needed extra supportive home care and personal care, therefore we connected him to our Personal Assistance Program and hired workers. He also needed help with making his bathroom accessible, so we helped him with an assessment and let him borrow assistive technology from our Loan and Demonstration Project. But his biggest challenge was the emotional distress he was under. He stated he was afraid of being alone now, that he was anxious all the time with crippling fear and was suicidal. After many discussions, it was decided that he would benefit from an emotional support animal. We helped him pick out a dog from the Humane Society that he fell in love with and helped him obtain Roxy's certification for an emotional support animal status. One challenge emerged, Roxy was nervous around his wheelchair. Our staff took a wheelchair to the Humane Society and educated the staff on how to help Roxy become accustomed to the chair. Currently our consumer and Roxy, are living happily together. Our consumer stated that he does not know what he would have done if he did not have Roxy and MILC in his life.

The ILCs are a great investment as they provide assistance to people with disabilities and older adults to access employment, transportation, housing and to maintain/attain independence and health. These cost effective services contribute to keeping people out of costly institutions and nursing facilities (an average savings of 30% per person).

I have included testimonials from MILC consumers that have benefited from our services. These include testimonials from members of our drop in centers regarding the support they received during the pandemic.

Please support Assembly bill 175.

Thank you,



Eric Riskus
Independent Living Program Director