

Testimony Senate Finance Subcommittee –
May 15, 2017

Chairman Hackett, Vice Chair Tavares and members of the committee, my name is Melanie Hogan. I am the Executive Director of Linking Employment Abilities, and Potential (LEAP), a Center for Independent Living based in Cleveland.

I'd like to tell you about my predecessor, Doris Brennan. In 1954 Doris broke her neck in a car accident, she was 19 at the time. Paralyzed from the neck down, Doris believed that no matter what the circumstances of her life, her years would always have value and importance. She believed that people with disabilities had the same rights as everyone else, and she dedicated her life to that principal. She began by staring in the film about her rehabilitation "Able to Live Again", and with a growing sense of mission she became a founding member of the Cleveland Chapter of the National Paraplegia Foundation, the Disabled Rights Task Force, Advocates for Disabled Ohioans, and Ohio's network of Independent Living Centers – CILs. Doris advocated on behalf of person with disabilities at all levels of government. She fought for curb cuts, got the state to subsidize attendant care services, and, along with her peers, was responsible for accessible busses in Cleveland. Doris was appointed to the Governor's Council for people with disabilities and served on countless other committees and boards. She was a founding board member of an agency building quality, accessible and affordable housing and she was the first Ohioan to be named to the National Hall of Fame for Persons with Disabilities. She was also named a Diversity Champion by the National Conference for Community and Justice. She participated in the independent living rights movement which resulted in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and she was at the White House for the signing of the law. Doris spent decades spreading the message that people with disabilities don't need pity, they need a chance to succeed, like anyone else.

With her vision of total accessibility and complete inclusion, and her faith in the human spirit, Doris was a master at helping people realize their intrinsic worth. As the executive director of LEAP she was starkly aware that self-worth is strongly tied to one's ability to be a productive contributing member of society. Doris began advocating for employees and educating employers about the value of hiring persons with disabilities, in addition to the independent living services the agency was already providing.

For the past 35 years LEAP has held fast to Doris' commitment to empower individuals with disabilities to enhance their employment and independent living opportunities.

There are more than 57 million Americans with disabilities; and approximately 1,627,000 of those people live in Ohio, over 14% of Ohio's population, many of whom face the same barriers and challenges that Doris did. Recent data indicates that most of the consumers that we serve live in poverty with a total household income between 13-18% of the Federal Poverty Level. In 2015 the employment rate for working age people with disabilities in Ohio (21-64) was 35.6% compared to 79.5% for their non-disabled counterparts.

Each of the 12 independent living centers in the State provide five core services: information and referral, individual and systems advocacy, peer support, independent living skills training, and transition services. Transition services were added as a fifth core service with the 2014 passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act within WIOA. Transition services include the transition of individuals with significant disabilities from nursing homes and other institutions to home and community-based residences with appropriate supports and services, assistance to individuals with significant disabilities at risk of entering institutions to remain in the community, and the transition of youth with significant disabilities to postsecondary life.

The need for increased funding for Centers for Independent Living

The need for increased funding for Centers for Independent Living is critical in order to provide services to unserved and underserved populations. Increased funding will also enable CILs across the State to assist the developmental disability, vocational rehabilitation and workforce systems deliver on the promise of the Home and Community Based Rule (HCBS) change and WIOA .

On behalf of the 12 Centers for Independent Living, and those we serve, I have two requests:

1) Ensure that statutory language is included in the budget that clearly states the purpose of the Independent Living program and services, and includes the Federal statute that authorizes the program.

[By including this language, Ohio specifically affirms its commitment to allocate GRF (state) dollars to fund the work of the CILs in the provision of independent living (IL) services and to support the OSILC's efforts to coordinate and increase the impact of independent living services throughout the state. By including the federal citation, it is recognized that this program is authorized under Title VII of the Independent Living Services and Centers for Independent Living of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992, 106 Stat. 4344, 29 U.S.C. 796d.]

2 Reinstate the CIL line item (415-520) for the Centers for Independent Living: The CILs used to get GRF dollars to deliver services. Currently the only GRF dollars allocated to Independent Living go to the Statewide Independent Living Council and are used to draw down Federal match. Some of these funds leverage \$3.69 for every state dollar, while other GRF dollars draw down the Federal Part funds for the Centers at a 9:1 match.

On behalf of the Centers I respectfully request that the line item be reinstated and funded with \$360,000 per year. This will improve the Centers' ability to deliver an increased level of independent living services in a time of increased need, and to expand the availability of independent living services to more Ohioans throughout our existing service areas.

Ohio's investment in independent living services benefits all Ohioans

We are fully aware that asking you to restore and fund our line item will be difficult in a challenging budget environment. We also know that many members of the legislature understand the value of our services and the return on investment that independent living services can generate. Such as:

- **Increased Fiscal Responsibility and Decreased Dependence on Public Assistance:** [Centers provide required supports and services recognizing that disability benefits are offsets to the high costs of disability, rather than subsidies for the inability to work. We provide benefits assistance and analysis in order to support a person with a disability in understanding the relationship between their benefits and their employment goals.]
- **Increased Savings Through Community Based Living:** [Assisting persons who are able to transition from institutions back into the community settings of their choice generates savings for the state when people with disabilities utilize Home and Community Based Waiver services. It costs on average more than \$75,000 per year for a person to live in a semi-private nursing home room. A person can be provided IL services so he or she can live in the community, saving the state millions of dollars on institutional care.]
- **Employment and Increased Tax Revenue:** [It takes a variety of services to address the needs and barriers experienced by persons with disabilities as they seek to be fully integrated, contributing members of society. Essential vocational rehabilitation services are augmented by independent living skills services, remedial and enrichment education and training, personal assistance services, accessible/affordable housing and transportation, access to assistive aids and devices, income supports

and health care --all of these services are necessary so that individuals with significant disabilities can successfully live and work in the community.]

Independent Living is an Efficient Use of State Resources and Fiscally Responsible

Funding provided to Centers for Independent Living (CILs):

- Will support the State's improved quality and cost savings agenda
- Help keep individuals out of nursing homes and institutions, by providing services that support safe and healthy living in the community
- Help youth with disabilities transition to the work of work
- Help people with disabilities work safely in the community by providing the necessary training and supports

Doris' advocacy efforts on behalf of her peers instilled validations of self worth in countless individuals and helped dispel the myths and stereotypes of disability that limit people to a much greater degree than their disability ever could.

On behalf of the Ohio Association of Centers for Independent Living, I thank you for this opportunity to testify, for the support that the general assembly has given us in the past, and for your thoughtful consideration of increasing the availability of the invaluable and extremely cost-effective services CILs provide.

Thank you. I'll be happy to try to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

Melanie Hogan
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Linking Employment, Abilities and Potential (LEAP)