

# ANDRÉ JACQUE

STATE SENATOR • 1<sup>ST</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

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State Capitol · P.O. Box 7882

Madison, WI 53707-7882

*Testimony before the Senate Committee on Human Services, Children and Families  
State Senator André Jacque  
June 2, 2021*

Good Morning Colleagues,

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 SB 190.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 190.

## 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.

# options

for independent living<sup>inc</sup>

•••Taking control of tomorrow•••

To: Senate Health and Human Services Committee

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

Date: Wednesday, June 2, 2021

Re: Support of SB190 – Statewide Increase for Independent Living Centers

Dear Committee Members,

I am here today to ask for your support of Senate Bill 190, 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, the majority of which are underserved. These include the counties Sen. Ballweg, Sen. Wimberger, and Sen. Jacque cover, with the exception of Brown. The population from 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.

So you have heard the numbers, 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.

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920-490-0500 • toll free 888-465-1515

[www.optionsil.com](http://www.optionsil.com)



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 person. I was surprised to meet the staff person and saw they used a power wheelchair! Really, if he could work, so could I was my thought. Options staff was able to work with me to locate an accessible apartment. After I moved into Green Bay, Options asked me to volunteer for them. Within a year I started a DVR work program at Options, and then I was hired by Options a year later.

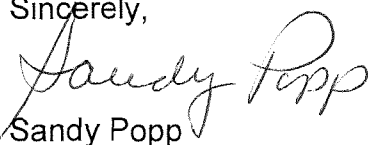
The services Options provided me not only included housing location, but also peer support, which was invaluable. I was actually working at Options with people who had disabilities who were confident, independent and self-supporting! Knowing other people with disabilities could work and maintain their independence was so 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, part of the management team.

I have seen individuals with disabilities become more independent, confident, and self-supporting 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!

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 increased, along with the cost for mileage, employee benefits, etc. Yet, the funding we receive has not increased, especially now that we have to cover three additional services under the fifth core service of transition. I hope that you will support this request for funding and 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





**Independent Living Resources**  
4439 Mormon Coulee Road  
La Crosse, WI 54601  
(608) 787-1111

May 28, 2021

To: Senate Health and Human Services Committee

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

Re: Support of Senate Bill 190

Dear Committee on Health and Human Services,

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 Centers 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

**Website:** [www.ilresources.org](http://www.ilresources.org) • **E-Mail:** [advocacy@ilresources.org](mailto:advocacy@ilresources.org) • **FAX:** (608) 787-1114  
**TDD/TTY:** (608) 787-1148 • **Toll Free Voice:** (888) 474-5745 • **Toll Free TTY:** (888) 378-2198

## Sara Eckland ILR Re: Support of Senate Bill 190

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





June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021

Wisconsin State Senate  
Senate Committee on Human Services, Children and Families  
Senator Jaque, Chair  
Senator Ballweg, Vice Chair

Testimony in Support of SB 190

Dear Committee on Human Services, Children and Families:

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 over four years. Access to Independence is the independent living center that serves all of Columbia, Dane, Dodge, and Green counties, which includes our beautiful Capitol building. Our agency office is on Madison's east side, in Senator Agard'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 Senate Bill 190, and I want to thank the committee for including this issue as part of your 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 direct 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](mailto:info@accesstoind.org) **Website:** [www.accesstoind.org](http://www.accesstoind.org)



**PSC**  
of WISCONSIN

**ACL**  
Administration for Community Living



**WisTech**  
Assistive Technology Program





## 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, and which receives state and federal approval. I ask that this committee, and ultimately the full legislature, pass SB 190, 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](mailto:jasonb@accesstoind.org)

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June 2, 2021

TO: Committee on Human Services, Children and Families

FROM: Midstate Independent Living Choices, Inc.

Zoe Kujawa, [zkujawa@milc-inc.org](mailto:zkujawa@milc-inc.org), 715-344-4210

RE: Senate Bill 190 and Senate Bill 253

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 Senate Bill 190 and Senate Bill 253.**

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."*

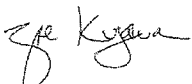
After a horrific car accident our consumer became a wheelchair user for the first time and needed help transitioning back to his home from a nursing home. He needed extra supportive home care and personal care, therefore we connected him to our Personal Assistance Program and hired workers. He also needed 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 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 Senate Bill 190 and Senate Bill 253.**

Thank you,



Zoe Kujawa  
Executive Director

RCC:

" I FELT RELIEVED WHEN WE OPENED AFTER LOCKDOWN BECAUSE I DID NOT FEEL SO ALONE ANYMORE. I FELT LIKE I GOT MY SUPPORT AND CURBHOUSE FAMILY BACK. "

- WYNITA S.

" WHEN THE CURBHOUSE RE-OPENED, I WAS RELIEVED BECAUSE ALTHOUGH SOLUTIONS BRINGS BALANCE, LOANLESS AND HAPPEN IF YOU DON'T FIND PEOPLE YOU CARE ABOUT TO FILL THAT UP. "

- JOSH S.

" I'M GLAD WE WERE OPEN WITHOUT IT (RCC) I WOULD ISOLATE MYSELF AND HAVE NO SUPPORT. "

- JEFF S.

## Morgan Potter

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**From:** Dixie Weber  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 26, 2021 2:28 PM  
**To:** Morgan Potter  
**Cc:** Eric Riskus  
**Subject:** ABW Reviews

WOW! Lots of people here today, with lots to say.

GC: The people here are my family; other relatives have "cut me off." I'm capable of taking my own life, but ABW keeps me from doing that. I know that you can get help, but sometimes it takes a while. Some of my meds give me side effects, but I can talk about that here. When I took class that you taught, I found out about the Clubhouse. I go so few places, especially due to COVID, that I really appreciate being able to come to the Clubhouse. When ABW was closed, staff called me, and that made so much of a difference!

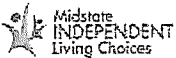
CW: I almost signed myself into Norwood because of my husband and realized it wasn't worth it and decided to come to the Clubhouse and talked to Eric and he was very caring and attentive to me and even gave me some suggestions which were very helpful. Here I feel like I can share, and I don't have to care about what I say here; I'm accepted. I have some other things to do today, but I figured I better come here, too. It helps me calm down.

BP: The Clubhouse is a place to meet people that give me a resource when I needed to reach out to people. They gave me knowledge about many subjects. They also cook good food for lunch, and I'm able to help with that. I also help with cleaning. I don't get a chance to do any of that where I live in a group home. I'm working to be independent so I can get my own place. ABW is a place where I can express my emotions, and people care.

AM: (staff) saved my life. My social worker is always telling me to get down to the clubhouse! He knows it helps me. Sometimes I'm having a "Bridgeway day", where I feel like I need to sign myself into Bridgeway (mental health CBRF). Coming to ABW makes me feel safe and calm. It keeps me out of Bridgeway.

Also DN and JM. Will send another email.

**Dixie Weber**  
*Certified Peer Specialist*



A Better Way Clubhouse  
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**IMPORTANT WARNING:** This message is intended for the use of the person or entity to which it is addressed and may contain information that is privileged and confidential, the disclosure of which is governed by applicable law. If the reader of this message is not the intended recipient, or the



Dear MILC

Thank you so much for the use of all the equipment for Rick.

When he came home he was so weak and the supplies you lent got him thru some really trying times.

He has come a long way and is done using everything that was available and going to out-patient therapy now. Thank you all so much at Midstate Independent Living.

You guys rock!

-Sincerely

Rick and Deb Miller

**From:** Patricia Caudill [<mailto:paloca43@gmail.com>]

**Sent:** Thursday, January 23, 2020 2:32 PM

**To:** Eric Riskus <[eriskus@milc-inc.org](mailto:eriskus@milc-inc.org)>

**Subject:** From David Caudill

January 22, 2020

To whom it may concern,

I am thankful for my Daily Living Skills provider because he helped me learn how to cross the street safely, and he helped me learn how to be safe while I am shopping in Target. He also helped me learn how to be safe while I am riding bike on the bike trail up the street from us. He also helped me know what to write in a letter to a neighbor, and I mailed the letter to him. I am thankful for everything my Daily Living Skills provider taught me.

Sincerely,

David Charles Caudill



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June 2, 2021

TO: Wisconsin Senate Committee on Human Services, Children and Families

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

RE: Hearing to Consider Senate Bill 190

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.

# 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](mailto:moryan@charter.net)



To: Senate Committee on Human Services, Children & Families

Bill: Senate Bill 190

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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 SB190.



To: Senate Committee on Human Services, Children & Families

Bill: Senate Bill 190

June 2, 2021

My name is Deb Langham and I am the Chief Operating Officer for Independence First a Center for Independent Living. I would like to take a moment or two to speak to the committee about the important role Independent Living Centers have in assisting individuals with all types of disabilities to regain and maintain their independence in the community through Assistive Technology, Benefits Counseling, and Youth Transition Services.

### **Assistive Technology Services**

We offer loans and demonstrations of a variety of adaptive equipment so that our consumers do not have to put their own funds at risk. Our inventory includes equipment that is typically well advertised but may not be the best choice so that users can make informed decisions. For example, before eBooks people who could not turn pages independently often wanted to try an automated page-turner. DVR frequently offered to purchase it as a job or school accommodation. This device required a great deal of setup and monitoring by a caregiver, and did not provide the independence users were looking for. The page-turner had a 100% rejection rate, every user who tried it decided not to pursue it. Over the lifetime of that one device, we saved DVR approximately \$30,000 in unnecessary purchases. By contrast, we were asked to make recommendations for a man who had sustained a brain injury at age 10. It caused him to develop seizures that left him foggy and unable to attend to toilet hygiene for several hours after a seizure. He would strike out at and injure his personal care workers when they tried to help him, and was at risk of institutionalization. A solution was identified that cost \$500, allowing his hygiene needs to be met at home while keeping his caregivers safe. It is estimated that living at home with personal care saved over \$22,000/year in costs over institutional care.

Since Oct 1, 2020 Independence First has completed 763 AT related Information & Referral requests, conducted 105 accessibility assessments for IRIS and 15 for DVR. We have established an in-house reuse program and have issued 87 devices free of charge to people who had no other options for purchase. We have obtained a grant from the Bader Foundation and established a mock aging-in-place bedroom that serves as a technology demonstration resource for seniors with disabilities and their caregivers. This is in addition to our BAT (Bathroom Assistive Technology) Cave, which is still the largest single collection of bathroom related technology in the country. We have over 16,700 devices in our loan and demonstration resource collection, spread across all four of our offices. In the last year, we taught virtual AT related classes to 145 students at 3 universities, 120 educators in a statewide professional organization, and facilitated 3 AT related support groups in Wisconsin and Nebraska during the pandemic.

Due to COVID-19, loans and demonstrations were dramatically affected by Independence First's limited ability to meet with people in-person. Independence First compensated for this by conducting virtual demonstrations and touch free loans. We also had a significant number of people that we could not serve virtually because they did not have the technology infrastructure (internet, cell phone, and computer) to allow us to interact virtually.

People with disabilities naturally turn to ILCs for help when facing disability barriers. Having the AT program in the ILCs makes it easily accessible to the largest number of people. We have an established reputation with



health care providers, educational institutions and service providers and we are a sought after resource for the community

During the pandemic, an older man was injured in a car accident and sustained a spinal cord injury. His family was not allowed to visit him during his hospitalization and rehab. They communicated with rehab staff by phone and Zoom, but did not get any actual hands on training in how to care for their father. The hospital gave the family a list of equipment they were supposed to purchase, Independence First's phone number and the AT4all website. The family visited the website and requested several items as a loan to determine whether they could benefit from them. After discussing the user's needs and capabilities, staff felt that other devices might be useful. The additional devices were demonstrated; the family opted to take several devices on loan to help them make the right choices. Following the loan, they received information on where to purchase the devices they wanted, and got several other devices through the free reuse program.

### **Benefit Analysis Services**

Based on data from the Wisconsin PROMISE cost-benefit analysis and sustainability framework, people who received benefits analysis services and who were able to work at some point generated approximately twice the tax revenue as those who were not receiving similar services (\$176,914 v. \$89,120 at an approximate federal rate of 10%).

Independence First assisted 313 people with Benefits Analysis services over the last five years.

An individual who was employed earning sub-minimum wage contacted Independence First with questions regarding his benefits. After receiving work incentives analysis services, he and his family realized that he could earn more and maintain his medical insurance. He is now employed part-time and living successfully in the community.

### **Youth Transition Services**

Youth Transition Services as delivered by the ILCs supplement (and in some cases entirely comprise) the training and education provided to youth with disabilities by the public school system as well as the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Independence First assisted 215 youth with Transition related services including 61 independent living workshop sessions covering over 19 different topics.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and "Safer at Home" social distancing, school and community based in-person trainings and workshops were drastically limited or prohibited during this period. The Youth Leadership Summit was conducted virtually, was still well attended.

A youth with disabilities participated in remote cooking classes during our Summer Programs ("If You Cook, They Come") and developed a better understanding of utilizing shopping lists and planning meals, and the skills she built has led to her now cooking full meals for her family on a regular basis.

Independent Living Centers are the only consumer directed organizations that provide services to all ages and all disabilities statewide, and in many cases throughout the state, these services are not being provided at all. The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated these large gaps in community resources and assistance. The ILCs are highly cost effective and a great investment as they assist people with disabilities gain employment, attain/maintain independence and health, and work to keep people out of costly institutions and nursing homes.

In July of 2014 the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was enacted to increase access and opportunities for employment, education, training, and support to individuals. Its original intent was to align workforce investment and services to improve delivery and increase economic self-sufficiency. As a part of the WIOA Act, three additional Transition services were added to the list of Core Services that ILCs must provide per WI State Statute 46.96 and federal WIOA/Sec.482 CENTERS.

Wisconsin's ILCs are now required to provide more services for more people without the concomitant increase in funding and this is unsustainable for the long-term.

We greatly appreciate your support in helping us to keep all of the communities in Wisconsin strong and whole. Please support SB190 to assist us in providing these much-needed services to people with disabilities in our great state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Langham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deb Langham, COO

June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021

To: The Senate Committee on Human Services, Children and Families

From: Karl Kopp, Executive Director

Society's Assets, 5200 Washington Ave #225, Racine, WI 53406

[www.societysassets.org](http://www.societysassets.org); [kkopp@societysassets.org](mailto:kkopp@societysassets.org); (262)637-9128

Regarding: **Senate Bill 190**

Society's Assets is a nonprofit founded in 1974 that serves southeastern Wisconsin. 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 ILCs provide services, supports, and systems advocacy for people of any age or disability. We are a resource for individuals with disabilities that also provides direct services.

Why this is Senate Bill 190 important?

- 1.) 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.
- 2.) ILCs are the only consumer directed organizations that provide services to all ages and all disabilities statewide.
- 3.) The ILCs have received no increase in state funding for 20 years yet costs to operate increase each year.
- 4.) All 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 230%.
- 5.) More funding will help serve more people.

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.

### **Stories**

**Jane** - There was a woman we will call "Jane" who was in a tax funded nursing home requesting to go back home, and live with her disabled son, and disabled mother. Jane called us asking for help. Staff went to visit Jane; Jane had not been washed or even asked to get dressed since that morning. After meeting with Jane, we stepped in and were coordinating with all the healthcare stakeholders to have Jane leave the nursing home. The home needed some modifications, which the property owner was more than willing to allow – like widen of a doorway 4 inches. The costs to be in the nursing home was about \$11,000 month. Jane wanted to be back home with her son and mother who are disabled. The week she moved back home she passed away. She could have not only been home months before she passed saving the state money but spending time with her family.

**OVER – continues on back of this page**



**Dan** - As the Executive Director at Society's Assets, I'm 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 in the country 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, but it was the decision by Dan's wrestling team to meet that Saturday for practice and that would change Dan's life forever. 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 arranged around them for protection. At that moment Dan could not move—or feel—his legs. He had fractured his vertebrae's, damaging his spinal cord. He was paralyzed and would not walk again. He would require a wheelchair for mobility and would need to depend on others for bathing, dressing, toileting, and transfers. In the 1960s, there were few services available for people with physical disabilities or their families, and Dan's family struggled both financially and emotionally. His parents spent the time Dan was in rehabilitation preparing for his new life and making their house wheelchair accessible so their son could return home. Dan returned home with support from his family and went back to Horlick High School in the fall of 1964. For the remainder of Dan's time in high school, his friends transported him in his manual wheelchair to classes. After high school graduation, **Dan attended the University of Wisconsin—Parkside**. Dan's first job was as a manager trainee at Goodwill Industries, and he purchased his first home in Racine at the age of 25. Dan made it his life's work to advocate for people with physical disabilities and to ensure they have access to the same opportunities 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 of Wisconsin 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. If it was not in-part for the support of family and friends, it could have been a much different outcome. If he would have been placed in a state funded institutional setting – **estimated cost would be over \$80,000 a year**. Not to mention all the lives he helped make a difference for – kind of like the Christmas movie "**It's a Wonderful Life**".

Wisconsin has seen a population growth of about 10% over the last 20 years. CDC reports 1 in 4 US adults live with a disability. Yet state funding has remained flat for ILC's during that time.

Remember – “no money, no mission”.

**Thank you for considering moving forward this important bi-partisan legislation and for protecting all individuals with disabilities in Wisconsin from being placed prematurely in an institutional setting.**