

Barry Fox-Quamme

Executive Director. Independent Living Resources
Center for Independent Living Serving Portland Tri-County Region

Ways & Means Testimony

March 2nd, 2023

Good Morning Co-Chairs Campos and Valderrama, and Other Committee Members,

My name is Barry Fox-Quamme. I am from Damascus, Oregon.

I am here to petition this committee to increase funding for Oregon's seven Centers for Independent Living (CILs) by \$2.6 million. The CILs are funded under the DHS budget.

We are requesting these funds to implement Pay Equity for people with disabilities working at Oregon CILs. There has not been a meaningful increase in CIL SG Funds for 10 years!

We ask that you embrace the principles of the CIL Pay Equity Policy Option Package (POP) that was a part of the DHS budget recommendation. This increase in funding was vetted and approved by DHS, but was not included in the new governor's budget (few were).

CILs are unique. Our funding is administered by Vocational Rehabilitation, but we are not a VR Program. CILs are part of a federal/state partnership that often doesn't get much attention.

Yet CILs need attention! We dramatically improve the quality of life for Oregonians!

The Pay Equity POP offered by VR and DHS is not to expand staffing. Rather, the \$2.6 million will provide living wages and benefits for people with disabilities employed at CILs.

Without this funding, CILs are becoming less competitive employers, and losing staff members to the public and private sectors. Many staffs get limited or no employee benefits, and after 10 years, wages fall short in an inflationary economy. CILs are losing staff experience and wisdom!

The number of Oregonians with disabilities has increased from 600,000 people in 2019 to about 1 million people in 2023, primarily as a result of the pandemic. About 15% of people who have had Covid-19 are projected by public health officials to experience disabling Long Covid-19 symptoms. CILs are responding creatively to the needs of these Oregonians with disabilities!

CILs partner with and complement VR, APD and Public Health Services, advancing access to the public safety net, empowering people with disabilities to live more independently.

I have served as executive director at Independent Living Resources in Portland for more than 17 years. The majority of ILR's staff members are people who experience disability themselves, and also hold advanced degrees. We employ 12 staff members and three MSW graduate interns.

I am also a person with a significant disability. I have a progressive idiopathic peripheral neuropathy condition that makes it hard to walk at times. My condition has worsened significantly as a result of my Covid-19 case in the fall of 2021. Covid-19 seems to have this effect on many people who have existing or past viral infections, reactivating both acute and chronic conditions. Perhaps some of you are quietly sharing this fate.

Senator Tim Kaine, of Virginia, has a compelling January 7th Twitter Post testifying to his own story of Long Covid symptoms that he and many Members of Congress are experiencing.

(A link to his post is in my testimony below, just cut & past to see Senator Kaine's short video)

<https://twitter.com/morethanmysel/status/1611888074203488256?s=46&t=YQ3SZ1sqBvXWnNqxfMad2qQ>

As I approach my 65th birthday this year, my retirement is only a few years away. Many Oregon CIL directors are moving toward retirement. Our staffs work tirelessly, empowering people with all types of disabilities. We leverage resources in effective ways, partnering with APD, VR and Public Health to open doors for consumers! We share a heartfelt passion to leave our agencies strong for the next generation of peer advocates!

Pay equity is vital for Oregon's people with disabilities serving people with disabilities!

Please help us ensure that thousands of vulnerable Oregonians continue to receive vital services! Rise up to meet the growing need by funding Pay Equity for CIL employees!

At such a crucial time when more are disabled due to the pandemic, step up and enhance your investment in our work! Please invest the \$2.6 million more needed to live out our mission!

Thank you for considering my testimony ~

Barry Fox-Quamme
Damascus, Oregon

Person with a Disability
ILR Executive Director
AOCIL Board President