



Topeka Independent Living Resource Center

785-233-4572 V/TTY • FAX 785-233-1561 • TOLL FREE 1-800-443-2207
501 SW Jackson Street • Suite 100 • Topeka, KS 66603-3300

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Senate Committee on Ways & Means
Senator Carolyn McGinn, Chair

Testimony in Support of SB 173
Mike Oxford, Exec. Dir.
Topeka Independent Living Resource Center
Topeka, KS 66603
785.233.4572
tilrc@tilrc.org

The Topeka Independent Living Resource Center (TILRC) is federally funded Center for Independent Living (CIL) and is a civil and human rights organization. Our mission is to advocate for justice, equality and essential services for a fully integrated and accessible society for all people with disabilities. TILRC has been providing cross-age, cross-disability advocacy and services for over 30 years to people with disabilities. Our agency has been particularly interested in and committed to assuring that people who require long term services and supports have access to information, services and supports that offer choices; choices that promote freedom, independent lifestyles and dignity, including the dignity of risk. TILRC is owned, managed and operated by people with disabilities.

Topeka Independent Living Resource Center (TILRC) supports Senate Bill 173. TILRC is an FMS provider. This means we act as a fiscal agent for individuals with all types of disabilities and of all ages that choose to direct, control and manage their HCBS pursuant to state laws passed in 1989. As an FMS agency, we provide “Information and Assistance”, or I & A. I & A basically means assisting and supporting individuals with the tasks associated with self-direction.

Most recently, due to changes in US Dept. of Labor requirements in 2012, individuals who self-direct have had to convert into sole proprietor businesses. This means each individual has to have her own FEIN, Workers Compensation insurance, Unemployment Insurance and rating,

Advocacy and services provided by and for people with disabilities.

has to negotiate wages and possible overtime with each worker, etc. This additional complexity has added immensely to our administrative burden.

I am proud to say that TILRC has been on the cutting edge of self-direction and independent living here in Kansas and nationally. TILRC was the first provider of self-directed services in the state after playing a leading role in passage of the laws in 1989 that allow this independent living model to operate.

Notwithstanding this history and notwithstanding our loyalty to those we serve, some of whom have been with us since 1992, we are close to being unable to continue as an FMS provider and have been having to discuss withdrawing from provision of this service; a service model we helped to invent both here at home, and around the country, because of losing money. The bottom line is - we need an increase in the reimbursement rate.

In a related vein, workers need an increase, too. Fast food workers in Lawrence and many places elsewhere in the state make a better starting wage than personal care attendants.

Monitoring baskets of French Fries pays better than assisting with bowel/bladder care, trache care and so on. Personal care attendants essentially have the same pay whether brand new to the job, or whether they have 20 years' experience. Workers need a raise! They are the backbone of all HCBS without whom the programs wouldn't work. Low wages have saved enough money. It is not fair to keep costs down on the backs of those most important to the success of the program!

It is for all of these reasons that I ask you to please report SB 173 out favorably.

Thank you for your time and attention.