

## Composition Of Statewide Independent Living Councils

### INTRODUCTION

The 1992 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act greatly expanded the role and responsibilities of the statewide independent living councils, in effect making them full partners with vocational rehabilitation in the independent living process. Primary among the new responsibilities of the councils is collaborating with the state vocational rehabilitation agency to develop the state independent living plan--including determining use of independent living funds and monitoring, reviewing, and evaluating implementation of this state plan.

These new responsibilities (detailed in Section 705) provide councils with very significant authority in statewide independent living program administration--an authority that was lacking prior to passage of the '92 Amendments.

Therefore, it is very important that people who are appointed to the councils be not just knowledgeable about but also have a real commitment to disability rights and the independent living philosophy--and their translation into the kinds of service programs and advocacy activities that are genuinely appropriate for independent living centers.

### COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

**Appointment.** Members of the independent living council in each state (or territory) are appointed by the governor. (Exception: In certain states, another entity may be authorized to make appointments instead of the governor.) The Act requires the governor (or appointing entity) to solicit recommendations from organizations representing a broad range of people with disabilities prior to selecting individuals to serve as members of the council.

**Composition of the Council.** The council membership must include:

--At least one director of an independent living center who has been selected by other center directors in the state to fill this role.

--A representative from the state vocational rehabilitation agency, who serves in a nonvoting ex officio role; representatives from other state agencies providing services to people with disabilities may also be appointed as nonvoting ex officio members of the council.

--At least one representative of the directors of any American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services program, if there is one in the state.

Other potential council members include staff and board members of independent living centers (in addition to the center director selected by his or her peers), parents

and guardians of people with disabilities, advocates of and for people with disabilities, representatives from private businesses, representatives from organizations providing services to people with disabilities, and the catch-all, “other appropriate individuals.”

**Consumer Control.** It is important to note that the Rehab Act requires that the majority of the members of the council be comprised of people with disabilities who are not employed by a state agency or independent living center.

**Membership Qualifications.** Individuals selected to serve as members of the council must be knowledgeable about independent living centers and services and must represent different parts of the state as well as different disability constituencies.

## SELECTING THE “RIGHT” PEOPLE FOR THE SILC

Because of the expanded role that councils will play in planning and overseeing independent living service delivery in each state, there will likely be a number of organizations that will wish to participate in the appointment process set up by the SILC and the governor’s office. As a result, persons may be recommended for appointment to the council who have insufficient understanding of independent living and the role that centers play in delivering independent living services and conducting advocacy activities.

It is of critical importance that people involved in independent living--those who know best about the independent living philosophy and what it means in terms of service delivery and advocacy--establish a procedure whereby their recommendations can be conveyed effectively to their governors.

In addition, many governors may be unaware of the changes in the Act and their responsibilities with regard to appointing people to serve on statewide independent living councils. It is in your best interest as a supporter of independent living to alert your state governor and appropriate legislative aides concerning changes in the Act, in your interest to assure appropriate representation on the council, and, especially of value, to assist the governor in identifying potential council members who meet the criteria spelled out in the Act.

We recommend that you do the following:

- network with centers, associations of centers, and other independent living advocates in your state concerning appointments to state councils and SILC committees;
- contact people with different disabilities to determine their interest in serving on the council;

- send to the governor a list of individuals, along with contact information, that might be considered by him or her in meeting the requirements for representation spelled out in the Act;
- offer your assistance in identifying other individuals who might be considered for council membership, should the governor need additional recommendations;
- offer the governor your expert assistance with issues of accessibility and accommodation in organizing and convening council meetings that promote optimal involvement of people with disabilities; and
- offer assistance in securing additional information about the new Act if the governor has questions or concerns about what he or she is supposed to do.

Because of the critical role that the statewide independent living councils will play in planning effective delivery of independent living services and assuring full empowerment of people with disabilities, it is of utmost importance that independent living advocates take a proactive and assertive role to assure that councils be made up of people who understand the independent living philosophy.

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