

Bill: HB-2: General Appropriations Act 2021-01-28 08:00 AM - (H) JAS on Health and Human Services

Position: Proponent

Representing an Entity/Another Person: Yes

Organization: National Federation of the Blind of Montana

Name: Joy Breslauer

Email: breslauerj@gmail.com

Phone: (406) 454-3096

City, State: Great Falls, Montana

Written Statement: Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

My name is Joy Breslauer. I am the first vice President of the National Federation of the Blind of Montana, as well as an individual with a lifelong disability, blindness. I am writing to urge you to preserve the funding for the Disability Employment and Transitions Department in its entirety. Cuts to this funding will severely impact the availability of programs and services to the blind and other people with disabilities, services that not only impact the quality of their lives but, in some cases, their ability to live at all.

This funding sustains such programs as vocational rehabilitation for youth and working age adults, pre-employment transition services for high school students, training in orientation and mobility and other alternative techniques and tools for the blind, independent living services for people with disabilities and the older blind, the Montana Business Enterprise Program and, formerly, NFB Newslines. These programs are not just nice to have or optional; they are essential to those of us who need them. Because we are a unique population with unique needs, the access to training, rehabilitation, and other services we need in order to be successful is not available anywhere else.

I graduated fifth in my class of 579 students in public school, I attended college, I am a wife, mother, grandmother, homeowner, tax payer, and a retired worker after 43 years. Statistically, the employment or underemployment rate for the blind is over 70%. If I had not had the benefits of the programs provided by Disability Employment and Transitions, I might have spent my life living with my parents or living on Social Security. My life was incredibly enriched by having access to these programs. When considering funding for Disability Employment and Transitions, I strongly urge you to use the 2021 budget submitted by the Governor as your starting point, rather than going back to the 2019 budget. Our very lives depend on what you decide.

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Position: Proponent

Representing an Entity/Another Person: Yes

Organization: Montana Independent Living Project

Name: Maria Stout

Email: mstout@milp.us

Phone: (406) 594-7217

City, State: Helena

Written Statement: Individuals with disabilities rely on supportive services to enable them to be active participants in society. By reducing the budget, it will severely effect living an equitable life. Cuts to this division will mean that people with disabilities are at risk, and have less access to employment services, telecommunication services, and Independent Living Services statewide.

As a person with a disability, I had to wait a year and a half to receive Vocational Rehabilitation services, this not only effected my emotional state, but society as a whole, as I was not a contributing member of society.

As an Independent Living Specialist, I assist individuals with disabilities with accessing supportive services that lead them on a path to self-sufficiency. With out these services these individuals would fall through the cracks and there could be more incidences of homelessness, chemical abuse, and even suicide.

Please do not balance a budget on the backs of individuals with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Maria Stout

Independent Living Specialist



Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Patrick Maddison and I am a CEO for four community-based provider agencies as well as the Board President for the Montana Association of Community Disability Services (MACDS), our association is comprised of thirty-three community-based organizations in MT that provide residential, employment and day services to children and adults with disabilities. We understand that this committee is collecting information in order to build the HB 2 budget. We strongly encourage this committee to fully fund Disability Employment and Transition Division provider rates as they are for FY21. Our rates go directly to private sector wages, direct services to adults and youth with disabilities, improve our communities and contribute to a healthy Montana economy.

The funds appropriated to Disability Employment and Transition division in the form of provider rates have incredible benefits to people with disabilities, business and our local and State economies. These rates provide the ability for community based providers to find and maintain employment for individuals with disabilities, help local small and large business find employees they desperately need, reduce individual reliance on other State and Federal resources like social security and supplemental nutrition assistance program, and creates more individual tax payers contributing to state and federal income taxes.

The Disability Employment and Transition Division is an efficient use of tax payer dollars to help adults and youth secure employment and greatly contribute to our local and State economy.

Thank you for your time and commitment to Montana.

Sincerely,

Patrick Maddison, CEO Flathead Industries and Board President MACDS

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Position: Proponent

Representing an Entity/Another Person: Yes

Organization: Living Independently for Today & Tomorrow (LIFTT)

Name: Jed Barton

Email: jedb@liftt.org

Phone: (406) 294-5186

City, State: Billings, Montana

Written Statement: Chairman Reiger and Members of the Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services,

As one of four Independent Living Centers in the state of Montana, Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow (LIFTT) believes in a world where everyone regardless of disability has the right to live, be educated, work, and recreate in their homes and communities and to not be segregated from society in nursing homes and far off institutions. To that end, we provide Montanans with disabilities across our 18 county service area with services such as informational & referral, skills training, advocacy and peer support all of which are geared towards maximizing the independence and self-determination of our consumers thereby enabling them to take their place as fully formed citizens of our communities, state, nation and world.

Through the funding and resources provided for the Independent Living Services at LIFTT and our fellow CILs as well as Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Blind and Low Vision Services, Pre Employment Transitions, Transportation Coordination, and MTAP, The Disability Employment & Transitions Division and DPHHS and through them the whole of government and people of Montana are important partners in keeping this important work going.

We would like to take this opportunity to encourage you to continue providing this funding.

Thank You

Jed Barton

Outreach & Government Affairs Coordinator on behalf of Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow



Living Independently for Today & Tomorrow

1201 Grand Avenue Suite #1 Billings, MT 59102

(406) 259-5181, <http://www.lifft.org>

January 28, 2021

Chairman Reiger and Members of the Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services,

As one of four Independent Living Centers in the state of Montana, Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow (LIFTT) believes in a world where everyone regardless of disability has the right to live, be educated, work, and recreate in their homes and communities and to not be segregated from society in nursing homes and far-off institutions.

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Thank You,

Jed Barton

Outreach & Government Affairs Coordinator

on behalf of Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow

Living Independently for Today & Tomorrow

Empowering people with disabilities to "LIFTT" themselves above the barriers of life

Bill: HB-2: General Appropriations Act 2021-01-29 08:00 AM - (H) JAS on Health and Human Services

Position: Informational Witness

Representing an Entity/Another Person: No

Organization: N/A

Name: Amy E Besaw

Email: amyliz2022@gmail.com

Phone: (406) 529-8936

City, State: Kalispell

Written Statement: Thank you for your service to the people of Montana. I am the proud mother of a 17 year old young lady, Opal Besaw, who has participated in MYLF since the summer of 2019. The program has changed her life. She is now employed part time in a job where she can complete work completely independently. She has also now made contacts throughout the nation and has picked up several other short term jobs, as well as a position on the Special Education Advisory Panel for Montana's Office of Public Instruction. She has gained confidence in speaking and interacting with diverse groups of people, time management, and financial responsibility and is excited to attend college and live an independent life. She also was able, for the first time in her life, to be surrounded by people with disabilities, her peers, who were happy and friendly and successful. I also want to speak about Voc Rehab, but am out of space. I did not realize that 12:00 was the deadline for registering to testify, I hope you will still allow us to speak.