NEW YORK ASSOCIATION ON INDEPENDENT LIVING

155 WASHINGTON AVE | SUITE 208
ALBANY, NY 12210
518.465.4650 PHONE | 518.465.4625 FAX
INFO@ILNY.ORG | WWW.ILNY.ORG

January 29, 2026

Testimony to the Joint Legislative Education Budget Hearing on the 2026-27 Executive Budget proposal and

FUNDING FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTERS

Summary

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL), the statewide membership organization representing New York's network of Independent Living Centers (ILCs). ILCs are cross-disability, community-based, nonprofit organizations run by and for people with disabilities. They are the only statewide, disability-led service network in New York, ensuring that people with disabilities can live independently and participate fully in their communities.

We are grateful for the Legislature's longstanding, bipartisan support for Independent Living—most recently, the $750,000 increase in the FY 2024–25 State Budget, bringing total ILC funding to $16.75 million. Unfortunately, the FY 2027 Executive Budget again omits this increase from the ILC base, effectively cutting funding for the upcoming year.

We urge the Legislature to restore the previous $750,000 investment and make further targeted funding increases to bring the statewide ILC appropriation to **$25 million**—a long-overdue level necessary to sustain core services, stabilize the workforce, and meet growing community needs. We further urge passage of **A.2590/S.1580** to finally include ILCs in the statutory human services cost-of-living adjustment (COLA). This structural fix is essential to ending decades of inequitable treatment and ensuring the sustainability of this critical network. This year's Executive budget proposes a 1.7% COLA for human services agencies, which ILCs are not eligible for. Every year that ILCs are excluded from these COLAs only sets us further behind.

We also reiterate our strong support for the separate $20 million appropriation in the health budget for the 11 ILCs that previously served as Fiscal Intermediaries (FIs) in the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program (CDPAP). This transitional support is critical and fully justified given ILCs' rich history and statutory role in CDPAP. However, its existence highlights the large disparity in funding between the FI ILCs and the rest of the ILC network—disparities that must be addressed through increased core ILC funding.

Finally, we must raise serious concerns regarding the Statewide FI implementation. Although statute and contracts require Public Partnerships, LLC (PPL) to recommend ILCs as facilitators, PPL is not meaningfully doing so. The State-approved per-member-per-month rate creates a financial incentive for PPL to keep consumers for itself. System defaults automatically assign consumers to PPL whenever a facilitator relationship lapses, even briefly. The result is a slow but deliberate exclusion of ILCs from a program the Legislature explicitly required them to be part of. We are urging the Legislature to intervene. Without your assistance, PPL will continue to disregard both the statute and its contracts, and the role of ILCs in CDPAP will be eliminated in practice, if not on paper.

Background

Independent Living Centers are the State's only network of disability-led, cross-disability organizations. They provide essential, community-based services that help New Yorkers with disabilities navigate complex systems and live independently. Yet ILCs have experienced decades of chronic underfunding, even as demand has grown and the cost of delivering services has sharply increased.

A recent NYAIL-commissioned funding analysis highlights these inequities:

- Nine counties in New York State currently receive no ACCES-VR or federal Independent Living funding.
- Existing state funding does not account for cost-of-living variability, transportation barriers, unemployment levels, or economic vulnerability.
- The analysis found that a minimally sufficient ILC operating budget is $614,817—yet the average ILC receives only $390,000, a deficit of $224,817 per center, or $8.25 million statewide.

This gap demonstrates how fragile the ILC network has become—and how achievable it is to stabilize it with a relatively modest investment.

Compounding this structural underfunding, ILCs are excluded from the human services COLA because they sit within the State Education Department budget. As inflation, health insurance, workers' compensation, and wage expectations rise, Centers are being forced to eliminate staff, reduce services, or both. Since more than half of ILC employees are people with disabilities, funding shortfalls disproportionately harm the very community ILCs exist to empower.

Despite these challenges, ILCs continue to provide essential services—independent living skills training, peer counseling, advocacy, benefits advisement, housing navigation, institutional transition/diversion services, youth transition, and more. They partner closely with ACCES-VR, serving as referral sources and providing community-based wraparound services that support employment outcomes.

In 2018–19, pre-pandemic, the ILC network served nearly **117,000 New Yorkers**, an increase of 34,000 over six years. More recent numbers hover around 100,000—an artificially suppressed figure driven not by decreased need but by insufficient funding and capacity.

The demand is clear: people are calling us during moments of crisis—facing homelessness, hospital discharge with a new disability, urgent needs for accommodations, or major life transitions. ILC staff specialize in navigating complex, fragmented systems and helping people find solutions when they feel they have nowhere else to turn.

Fiscal Impact

An investment in Independent Living is not only the right thing to do—it is cost-effective. According to data produced by ACCES-VR, ILC services that help individuals transition from or avoid institutional settings save New York more than $9 for every $1 invested.

Raising the statewide ILC appropriation to $25 million will:

- Sustain and expand essential services in all regions
- Support retention of skilled staff
- Strengthen disability-led leadership
- Ensure stability and continuity of services
- Address longstanding inequities in funding distribution
- Deliver meaningful cost savings to New York State

Every dollar invested in ILCs yields real returns—in human outcomes, in community stability, and in reduced spending on far costlier institutional services.

Conclusion

We deeply appreciate the Legislature’s consistent commitment to Independent Living. With your leadership, New York can stabilize and strengthen the ILC network by:

1. Restoring last year’s $750,000 investment
2. Increasing ILC funding to $25 million statewide
3. Including ILCs in the statutory COLA (A.2590/S.1580)

4. Ensuring Statewide FI implementation reflects the Legislature’s intent and statutory requirements with respect to Independent Living Center inclusion.

These actions are necessary to ensure that every New Yorker with a disability—regardless of county, economic status, or service need—has access to essential Independent Living services in their community.

Thank you for your time, attention, and ongoing partnership.

Lindsay Miller
Executive Director
New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL)