



Bob Bethell Joint Committee on HCBS and KanCare Oversight

October 11, 2023

Chairperson Gossage, Vice-Chair Landwehr and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment about the KanCare program.

The Kansas Association of Centers for Independent Living, Inc. (KACIL) is a member organization comprised of eight (8) Centers for Independent Living (CILs) spanning the state. Our members cover diverse regions from metropolitan to frontier rural areas maintaining a commitment to promote the Independent Living Philosophy and provide the core Independent Living Services, upon which our grassroots organizations are founded. Services are provided in the individual's home; CILs are not assisted living facilities, and do not own or operate housing/apartments.

Our member Centers provide services to people with all types of disabilities of all ages and all income levels through grant funded and fee for service programs. Centers are consumer controlled, private nonprofit agencies promoting the Independent Living Philosophy of equal opportunity and self-determination for individuals with disabilities. Centers for Independent Living provide education and assistance to businesses and all other entities in the community to increase access for people with disabilities, including promotion of hiring people with disabilities.

We advocate at a local, state, and national level for the rights of all people with disabilities to actively participate in their communities, living, working and raising families in the communities of their choice.

Briefly, we want to address current HCBS and KanCare happenings and issues in this public comment opportunity.

- Promoting the Independent Living Philosophy and Self-Direction should be a primary focus for MCOs and HCBS Waiver Service Providers. KACIL members are concerned this focus has been lost in provision of KANCARE funded services.
- Rate Parity – Our members thank you for the rate increases for Home and Community Based Services that went into effect July 1 2023. These rate increases have created a huge disparity among Direct service worker pay rates depending on which Waiver an individual is enrolled in; as much as \$2/hour difference. Parity across all waivers is essential to level the direct service work force playing field. Please increase the rates to achieve equalization.

- We support efforts to provide additional funding to the HCBS Waivers sufficient to bring 20% of the individuals off the Waiver wait lists.

KACIL encourages the legislature to continue efforts to address the worker shortage including rate parity and investments in health insurance coverage, paid time off and paid training for DSWs. Medicaid expansion would undoubtedly provide coverage for DSWs and should be considered an opportunity to grow this field into a career path.

Additionally, KACIL members are continuing to seek adequate base funding and continue to talk with legislators about this need. You should have received an email recently from the CIL in your area talking about this. Attached to this testimony are success stories from many of our members demonstrating how this year's additional grant funds are being utilized. We believe that CILs can effectively fill many of the service gaps consistently brought up at KanCare Oversight hearings, such as assisting individuals with Medicaid enrollment and renewals and connecting individuals on Waiver waitlists with local resources, if sufficient funding was made available to CILs.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Audrey Schremmer (KACIL Secretary), Three Rivers, Inc., Wamego

Jill Dudley, (KACIL Treasurer), Independence, Inc., Lawrence

Deone Wilson (KACIL Chairperson), Resource Center for Independent Living, Inc., Osage City

Cindi Unruh (KACIL Vice-Chairperson), Independent Living Resource Center, Inc., Wichita

Angie Zimmerman, LINK, Inc., Hays

Michael Soodjinda, The Whole Person, Inc., Kansas City

Angie Saenger, Independent Connection, Salina

Erica Riveras, Beyond Barriers, Hutchinson

As Chairperson for KACIL and Executive Director of the Resource Center for Independent Living, Inc. (RCIL) I can attest that CILs are incredibly grateful for the recent increase to our Centers for Independent Living grant. Funds have already been used to serve more Kansans with disabilities. RCIL has hired an additional full-time Independent Living Specialist who will support consumers to achieve their independent living goals. Centers for Independent Living are known for filling gaps and providing services that consumers are unable to access from other providers, with this additional full-time staff member RCIL expects to serve an additional 150-175 individuals with disabilities each year. More individuals will be assisted in relocating from or diversion from entering nursing facilities. Employment, housing, and transportation goals will be achieved. Peer support will be provided. Access to healthcare will be attained. Needed medical equipment and assistive technology will be acquired. Accessible ramps will be built and more. Below are additional success stories from KACIL members.

Deone M. Wilson, Executive Director

Resource Center for Independent Living and Chair KS Assoc of Centers for Ind Living (KACIL)

A 60 year old individual was dropped off at a homeless shelter after living in their adult child's barn for two years. Their only possessions were the clothing they were wearing and a social security card. RCIL partners with the homeless shelter to acquire an apartment, food assistance and, most importantly, a plan for future goal setting to maintain housing and food security. Due to their intellectual disability, RCIL assisted with KanCare application and presumptive Medicaid forms and assistance establishing a primary care physician and referral to a medical specialist. RCIL provided support during appointments including communication assistance which is especially challenging for this individual. This individual received a crisis exception for HCBS services and now has a caregiver once a week assisting with shopping, transportation, checking their mail, cleaning, keeping track of medications, and keeping track of their appointments. In summary, RCIL staff assisted this formally unsheltered individual to obtain healthcare insurance (Medicaid), medical attention for severe back pain, Home and Community Based Services including medicine deliveries, connections with other local providers, obtaining a scooter for transportation and learning a safe route to medical services.

#### ***Resource Center for Independent Living – Osage City***

A homeless consumer in Lawrence shared how his life experiences, being, military life and subsequent mental health conditions have contributed to his homelessness. He had to leave the Lawrence Community Shelter due to lack of progress towards employment and housing goals and moved to Clinton Lake. In just a couple of weeks of working together, we completed his application for food assistance and are working towards completing housing authority applications. We worked together in creating a resume, cover letters, and references and applied to several positions. After numerous interviews he was offered his "first pick" job as a security guard. He has now completed his hire-on process vaccines, onboarding, background check, orientation, obtain passport, uniform, letter of intent and security guard license with some funding provided by Independence, Inc.

A KU student who lost his financial aid due to academic probation needed assistance in appealing the decision, re-establishing financial aid, and signing a lease so he could move out on his own for the first time. Assisted him with the appeal and re-obtained financial aid, helped in planning with his teachers,

advisors, and tutors to ensure he maintains the grades needed to continue to get financial aid in the future, and helped him in securing a lease. We will continue to work towards his independence by focusing on time and money management while maintaining a well-balanced and healthy lifestyle, being an active member of his community while furthering his education.

Consumer who has ran his own business for the last 25 years feared being unable to continue his work now that some physical disabilities were getting in the way. Instead of shutting down business, we were able to support him in creating a budget to assist him in his personal and work life. This led to him hiring staff to assist with tasks more strenuous. He hired 2 new employees and can continue his business operations due to the planning he completed with Independence, Inc. staff.

### ***Independence, Inc. Lawrence***

A gentleman who had worked hard his entire life, found himself becoming ill and not being able to continue working. The consumer contacted LINK and explained that he had applied for disability benefits on his own months prior. He had not heard anything about his disability application. He had not received a letter stating that his disability application was received. A referral was given to an Independent Living Specialist with several goals the consumer set up with an Information & Referral Specialist. One of his goals was assisting him with the Social Security Disability process. During the first meeting between the ILS and consumer, a call was placed to the Social Security Administration. During this call, ILS and consumer found out that the consumer's application had been received. It was just sitting on a desk, and nothing had been done with it. The representative at Social Security office put a rush on the application. Within a couple of months, the consumer was approved for disability. The consumer went from having no monthly income to receiving SSDI in the amount \$1800.00 per month.

### ***LINK Hays***

A woman came to train at LINK through the SER-SESCP (Senior Community Service Employment Program). She was afraid to do anything at first. She had been abused as an adult in relationships and obtained a Traumatic Head Injury when she was beat by her boyfriend. She didn't know there was anything to help with her brain injury or help for her to not depend on a man. She was completely controlled and dependent on someone else. She had nothing in her name. Training at LINK and requesting an Independent Living Specialist (ILS) to help her establish goals and assist with them. The ILS helped her to get assistance with low-income housing, disability, and Medicaid. While training at LINK, her confidence grew, her skills grew, she learned the ins and outs of the business. She was offered a part-time job four years ago. Most recently she was offered a full-time position with benefits including insurance. Everything is now in her name, apartment, car, cellphone, bills, etc. She is confident and happy. She is very thankful for the help she's received.

### ***LINK Hays***

Independent Connection covers 9 counties in central and northcentral Kansas and is excited to have additional grant funds to hire a new employee who is providing Independent Living services to individuals with disabilities in our service area. We are a small organization with only a few staff, so this increase was truly significant. Thank you for this opportunity to expand services in our region.

### ***Independent Connection, Salina***

With the new 20% increase of funding that we received for our ILS Department at Independent Living Resource Center, we were able to hire a half time employee for our ILS Department who is doing cooking classes for consumers with disabilities. With the hiring of this employee, we were able to add more classes for people waiting to be able to take the cooking classes. Below is a success story I'd like to share.

"Several weeks ago, I received a call from the mother of one of our consumers who is 21 and has Autism. Her son has been on our wait list to be able to take our cooking classes because we did not have enough staff to take on any more classes, which he is now doing. The mother reached out to me to tell me what a wonderful program this has been for her son. With his Autism he would not try to make simple meals for himself or even try different food items. She said she tried everything she could think of to get him to reach out beyond his comfort level with no success. Since coming into our cooking classes, the mother, with emotion in her voice, expressed her gratitude for her son being able to take the classes because he is now trying different types of foods and cooking easy meals for himself. She said for most people this may not have seem like a huge success, but for her, she is ecstatic and so grateful because of being in the cooking classes she now knows that he can care for himself in the way of cooking for himself and good nutrition and this is huge for him and their family." Thank you for the funding and making a difference for persons with disabilities!

***Independent Living Resource Center - Wichita***

3Rivers CIL is pleased to share that the increase in grant funds for this year was used to hire additional employees. Last spring, an individual reached out to our Atchison office for help in applying for disability. This individual had worked her entire life in fields requiring significant physical exertion and she could no longer perform these job duties. She didn't consider herself a "good student" and knew nothing about computers, leaving her to believe her only option was applying for disability. 3Rivers staff supported her to pursue basic computer and office training. With the additional grant funds, we were able to offer her a full-time position with benefits, as an Information and Referral Specialist. Now, when people call 3Rivers seeking information and assistance; they speak with someone who can, firsthand, explain how they can find help to meet their needs and pursue goals to improve their lives. This success story highlights what makes CILs unique, we are truly grassroots, consumer driven organizations, with the majority of employees being persons with disabilities.

***Three Rivers Inc. (3Rivers)***