

**Missouri Statewide Independent Living Council**  
**Missouri SILC Housing Committee**

To: Centers for Independent Living, Attn: Housing Advocates  
From: Missouri SILC Housing Committee  
Re: Accessible, Affordable Housing Advocacy  
Date: June 18, 2003

The current State Plan for Independent Living states that “the SILC will partner with the DSUs and the CILs to provide education and advocacy through contact with legislators, position papers, media releases, and meetings with community leaders and service providers, to increase awareness and commitment for increased accessible housing”. In 2002-2003, a number of Independent Living Centers across the state participated in the SILC Statewide Housing Committee’s coordinated effort to address this goal, with a great degree of success. Individuals with disabilities, local communities, and state government were among the groups involved in last year’s process, which culminated in SILC Housing Committee members and others with disabilities heading to the capitol to share the information we had gained and advocate for the passing of bills that would make affordable, accessible housing more easily obtained.

Everyone involved learned a great deal about the advocacy and legislative process, from the grassroots meetings at the local level through the nuts and bolts of getting bills passed into law in Jefferson City. The SILC Housing Committee encourages Missouri Centers to participate in activities for 2003-2004. Considering the successes several centers enjoyed this year, we feel that experience gained coupled with increased participation from CILs will continue to improve our chances of success when advocating for affordable, accessible housing.

There are a number of different ways CILs can participate. The following are examples of some of the activities and initiatives that have been a part of the SILC affordable, accessible housing push:

1. Involvement with the Statewide Housing Committee. The committee meets on a regular basis to review, plan, and implement steps toward advocacy at the state government level (culminating in the Legislative Education Process described below). Members from all Missouri CILs are invited to join the group. Advantages to being involved with the statewide group include the opportunity to guide advocacy strategies and ensure an additional opportunity to have your local community needs factored into the overall action plan.
2. Housing Forums. Many Missouri CILs hold educational forums regarding housing issues related to people with disabilities. Currently, some CILs do this independently, and some coordinate with the Statewide Housing Committee. Both methods are beneficial. The Statewide Housing Committee welcomes and

needs input from as many CILs as possible regarding the needs in their communities in order to gain a clear and broad-based understanding of Missouri's needs in this area. Even if your CIL doesn't participate on any other level, the Statewide Housing Committee strongly encourages CILs to share information regarding accessible, affordable housing issues. Doing so can only add to the effectiveness of your message. Furthermore, the more centers coordinate advocacy efforts, the easier it is to get legislators to listen to the message, and the quicker change is likely to happen.

3. **Housing Resource Lists.** One outcome of accessible, affordable housing forums involving housing providers and other community assets has been a greater understanding of the programs and financial assistance available to people with disabilities in different areas of the state. Information procured in this regard can be organized and made available to people with disabilities. For example, at this time, the SILC website has posted a Housing Resource List for Boone County, and several other counties are to come. There is a potential that this could develop into a statewide resource, organized county-by-county. This list can be viewed at <http://mosilc.org/HousingInfo.htm>. While this is certainly not a requirement for participation with the Statewide Housing Committee, it is an example of how involvement on the statewide level can positively impact people with disabilities, and how centers can work together to provide information to consumers in an easy-to-use, one-stop setting.

4. **Gathering Testimonials**

Written documentation from persons with disabilities, local support groups such as the United Way and homeless support personnel, and housing providers provide evidence for the issues that we advocate for. Testimonials tie a message to a person, or an agency, and often have a significant impact on how issues are viewed by legislators. A testimonial represents a vote.

5. **Development of Position Paper**

Input gained from individual CILs were and will be condensed for an official position paper outlining SILC's stance on affordable, accessible housing issues. These issues are likely to change over time. Input from CILs helps ensure that SILC accurately represents the overall statewide picture, as opposed to selected areas in different parts of Missouri.

6. **Legislative Education Process**

SILC Housing Committee members participated in the 2003 Legislative Education Process (LEP) in Jefferson City this past May, and plan to continue to participate in the LEP in upcoming years. The LEP provides education regarding the legislative process, but more importantly, it is an organized opportunity to meet, talk with, and influence our legislators at the Capitol. Group advocacy was

an effective method for those participating this year, as well as individuals meeting with their local representatives to share information and strengthen relationships. The LEP is the forum in which the Statewide Housing Committee consolidates the information gained from CIL affordable, accessible housing activities and uses this information to work toward effecting change in state government. The effectiveness of SILC's efforts during the LEP will be directly related to the quality and substance of the feedback received from centers that participate in the statewide effort.

The SILC Housing Committee would like to reiterate it's encouragement to Missouri Centers for Independent Living to join us in our statewide efforts over the coming years. We feel that our strength comes from the different perspectives each center brings, and that each community has individualized needs. Please consider participation in the Statewide Housing Committee, either as an active member or as a source of information that will be helpful to the committee, people with disabilities, and our communities in general. Thank you for your consideration of this matter, and feel free to contact Joseph Motavo or Troy Balthazor at the numbers listed below should you want more information or ideas on how you can be a part of the statewide effort.

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*The Whole Person*  
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*Troy Balthazor*  
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