

NEWS RELEASE

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Freedom Center Members Attend House Hearing

On April 30, 2002, the staff, volunteers, and consumers of The Freedom Center joined together and took a trip to Washington, DC. We attended a hearing before the US House Appropriation's Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education. The purpose of the hearing was to ask Congress to increase the Federal dollars for Centers for Independent Living (CILs). In the last two years, we have asked for \$25 million to the budget for CILs. This is Title VII, Part C funds via the US Department of Education. The budget was \$48 million two years ago. Last year, it was increased by \$10 million. It is because of this increase that we were able to seek funding and begin a new CIL in Frederick to serve Frederick and Carroll Counties. This year, the budget will be increased by \$4.5 million in which it will give us an increase in our funding. The increase in funding will allow us to hire more staff, seek more training, and allow us to begin more programs. For next year, President Bush has already requested there be an increase of \$7 million for CILs. We are requesting \$25 million so that across the nation there will be more CILs created and more dollars for already existing Centers.

This hearing was particularly exciting for us because a representative from Idaho was selected to testify on our behalf. He is a member of the National Council on Independent Living Board as well as an Executive Director for the Idaho Statewide Independent Living Council. To get his point across, he chose to use The Freedom Center as a model to show Congress the need for increasing the appropriation budget for the US Department of Education. The hearing went very well. The Chairman of the Subcommittee was very impressed and understood the history of the Independent Living Movement and how much Centers across the nation for the last 30 years have done to remove physical and attitudinal barriers for people with disabilities. He stated that he remembered what it was like before we began our quest for freedom and equal rights. We have come a long way, but we still have much to do.

We had nine people from The Freedom Center. Present were Jamey George, Executive Director, Paul Hartman, Disability Advocate, Chere Goretski, Disability Advocate, Vicki Mills, Board President, Russ Holt, Board Vice-President, Howard H., consumer, Bonnie T., consumer, Stephen H., volunteer and consumer, and Tammy C., consumer. We had a grand time. We traveled using the Marc Train from Frederick for the first time. It was a real bonding experience for all of us because we were new to each other. When we got to Union Station, we had

breakfast and explored Union Station. When it was time, we went to the hearing. There were many people with disabilities present. Our friends from Making Choices for Independent Living of Baltimore, MD were there. There were people from other CILs from at least 10 different states including Connecticut, Virginia, Idaho, Illinois, and West Virginia as well as Canada. We believe that we can accomplish our goals with power in numbers. The hearing room was packed with people with disabilities with standing room only. There were people waiting in the halls. This is the kind of impact we like to make. There will be many events such as this in the near future. The Freedom Center likes people with disabilities to join us in our efforts to do systems advocacy. There will be a schedule of events on this website to inform every one of upcoming events as they occur.