



2025 Idaho State Independent Living Council

Annual Report

(October 1, 2024 - September 30, 2025)

SILC
Idaho State Independent Living Council

Photo Credit: Tara Rowe, Balanced Rock Park

From the Chair

As Chair of the Idaho State Independent Living Council (SILC), I am honored to reflect on a year of meaningful progress and collaboration in advancing independence, inclusion, and opportunity for Idahoans with disabilities.

One of our greatest achievements this year was the successful passage of Idaho's ABLE Accounts legislation! Beginning in early 2026, Idahoans with disabilities and their families will finally have the ability to save for the future without jeopardizing access to vital benefits. This critical step forward creates lasting financial stability, empowers greater independence, and demonstrates what can be achieved when advocates, policymakers, and partners work together toward a common goal.

The Council also supported the release of the Office of Performance Evaluations (OPE) report on oversight in children's residential facilities, an important milestone toward accountability and ensuring quality care for Idaho's youth with disabilities and behavioral health needs.

This year, the Idaho SILC was honored to receive the Corey Rowley National Advocacy Award from the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL). This national recognition celebrates our Council's steadfast commitment to authentic systems change, community-based supports, and disability rights, and reflects the collective strength, integrity, and collaboration that define Idaho's Independent Living movement.

As a cross-disability council with members representing communities across our state, we are proud of the grassroots leadership our members demonstrate every day. Through statewide partnerships and active engagement with legislators, agencies, and community organizations, we continue to elevate lived experience, strengthen our advocacy, and make a lasting difference on the issues that impact Idahoans with disabilities.

Together, we are shaping a stronger, more inclusive Idaho, one where every individual has the opportunity to live, work, and thrive in their community.

Brittany Shipley
Chair, SILC

Photo of: Tara Rowe - Vice Chair,
Brittany Shipley - Chair,
Mel Leviton - Executive Director
at the Herrett Center in Twin Falls



From the Executive Director

The past year brought a mix of challenges, achievements and moments of reflection.

In January, the U.S. Department of Justice determined that Idaho is unnecessarily segregating adults with physical disabilities in institutional settings, violating federal civil rights law. While this finding doesn't immediately change conditions, it validates the experience of those affected and demands corrective action. It felt like a long-overdue win - but one that risks being overlooked. We cannot allow this moment to fade into complacency. Every person with a disability contributes to their community and deserves the right to live in the setting of their choice. Until institutionalization is no longer a threat for anyone, it remains a risk for everyone.

March brought a major legislative victory. After years of advocacy, House Bill 26 was signed into law on March 11, establishing Idaho ABLE Savings. These accounts will allow Idahoans with disabilities to save money locally, exceed traditional resource limits, and maintain eligibility for essential benefits. This milestone was decades in the making - beginning with federal legislation introduced in 2006, passed in 2014, and culminating in Idaho's success in 2025.

Throughout the year, SILC staff and Council members advocated with the disability community on systemic issues. We provided public comment on Medicaid policy changes, the State's transition to managed care and Medicaid's proposed reimbursement reductions. We spoke out on issues including affordable and accessible housing, community access, public health insurance, and the disproportionate institutionalization of children with disabilities in foster care. We met with legislators, members of Congress, federal partners and other policymakers, advocating for system retention and improvements for all people with disabilities.

Despite meaningful progress, significant challenges remain - housing and food insecurity, limited healthcare access, a shortage of direct care workers, cuts to special education programs and the growing need for transportation services, especially in rural areas.

Our Council members, most of whom are disabled, remain deeply connected to their communities. We are grateful for the opportunity to work alongside them as we strive to build an Idaho where people with disabilities are respected, included and valued.

Mel Leviton, Executive Director
Idaho State Independent Living Council

Photo Credit: Tara Rowe, Idaho State Capitol

Idaho SILC

The State Independent Living Council (SILC) is Idaho's only statewide, cross-disability organization dedicated to independent living and full community inclusion governed by a majority of people with disabilities in service to people with disabilities across the lifespan.



2025 Idaho SILC members

Mission:

We elevate the voices of people with disabilities, breaking down systemic barriers to inclusion and integration through advocacy and enhancing the ability of Idahoans with disabilities to live independently, direct their lives and strengthen their communities.

Vision:

We envision an Idaho where disability is respected as a natural part of the human experience and people with disabilities are included and valued.

Who Makes Up the Idaho SILC

Idaho State Independent Living Council Members

Voting Members

Brittany Shipley Council Chair - Parent Advocate - Region V
Tara Rowe Vice-Chair - Region V Person with a Disability
Justyne Collins Region I Person with a Disability
Erik Kimes Region III Person with a Disability
Ian Bott Region IV Person with a Disability
Faith Neibert Region VII Person with a Disability
Anhora Snodgrass At Large Person with a Disability - Region II
Kylie Reed At Large Person with a Disability - Region IV

Sherri Boelter CIL Representative - Disability Action Center NW
Joseph Vincent CIL Representative - Life, A Center for Independent Living
Jeremy Maxand CIL Director, Living Independence Network Corporation

Ex-Officio Members

Beth Cunningham Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Alan Aamodt Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Erin Olsen Idaho Commission on Aging
Russell Salyards Idaho Department of Health and Welfare

Members who Termed Off

Shiloh Blackburn Region VI Person with a Disability
Michael Lefevor CIL Director, Life, A Center for Independent Living

Idaho State Independent Living Council Staff

Mel Leviton Executive Director
Jami Davis Program Specialist
Megan Bates Financial Specialist
Janey Bruesch Administrative Assistant II



Photo Credit: Brittany Shipley, Bald Mountain

Meet People Where They Are

We are not defined by our disabilities, though others often define us by perceived and real limitations. Systems demand that people with disabilities meet a clear definition for a specific disability to gain access to services and support, including financial and medical assistance. We live a constant contradiction of proving we are worthy and productive enough, while also proving we are disabled enough to access the services, supports and resources that we need.

Support and services are not limited to home health care providers. Nor are they limited to social safety net programs. No two people with the same or similar disability are alike. Each disabled person is an expert in what they need to live fully in their community.

At least 25% of every community - ethnicity, color, identity, age and socioeconomic group - have a disability. Some communities, due to health and economic disparities include greater percentages of disabled people. The walls we create are the real barrier to inclusion and understanding. The SILC is involved in all sectors of community life: housing and homelessness, criminal justice, public health, economic development and education. Our Council is made up of givers who participate in many organizations outside of traditional disability service agencies.

Council Member Workgroups and Committees

The State Independent Living Council values connections within and outside of the disability community. Strengthening these bonds benefits Idahoans in every corner of the State. A few of the workgroups and committees Council members take part in are:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Board - Coeur d'Alene	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Youth Crisis Center Advisory Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lewiston InterAgency Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• State Behavioral Health Planning Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Brain Injury Alliance Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Child Welfare Advisory Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kootenai Recovery Advisory Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intermountain Fair Housing Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Area Agency on Aging Advisory Board - Region II	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Region V Juvenile Justice Commission

We Live in All Corners of Idaho*

Percentage of People with Disabilities by County

County	Percentage	County	Percentage
Ada	11.20%	Gem	17.70%
Adams	15.60%	Gooding	16.10%
Bannock	15.40%	Idaho	16.30%
Bear Lake	15.00%	Jefferson	10.80%
Benewah	21.20%	Jerome	12.70%
Bingham	16.10%	Kootenai	15%
Blaine	11.70%	Latah	12.10%
Boise	15.10%	Lemhi	22.20%
Bonner	17.80%	Lewis	24.80%
Bonneville	13.70%	Lincoln	13.30%
Boundary	17.90%	Madison	7%
Butte	18.80%	Minidoka	12.40%
Camas	18.40%	Nez Perce	17.30%
Canyon	14.90%	Oneida	14.40%
Caribou	14.10%	Owyhee	17.70%
Cassia	13.50%	Payette	16.30%
Clark	15.20%	Power	14.60%
Clearwater	23.30%	Shoshone	22.60%
Custer	27.10%	Teton	7.40%
Elmore	16.90%	Twin Falls	14%
Franklin	12.20%	Valley	11%
Fremont	17.90%	Washington	17%

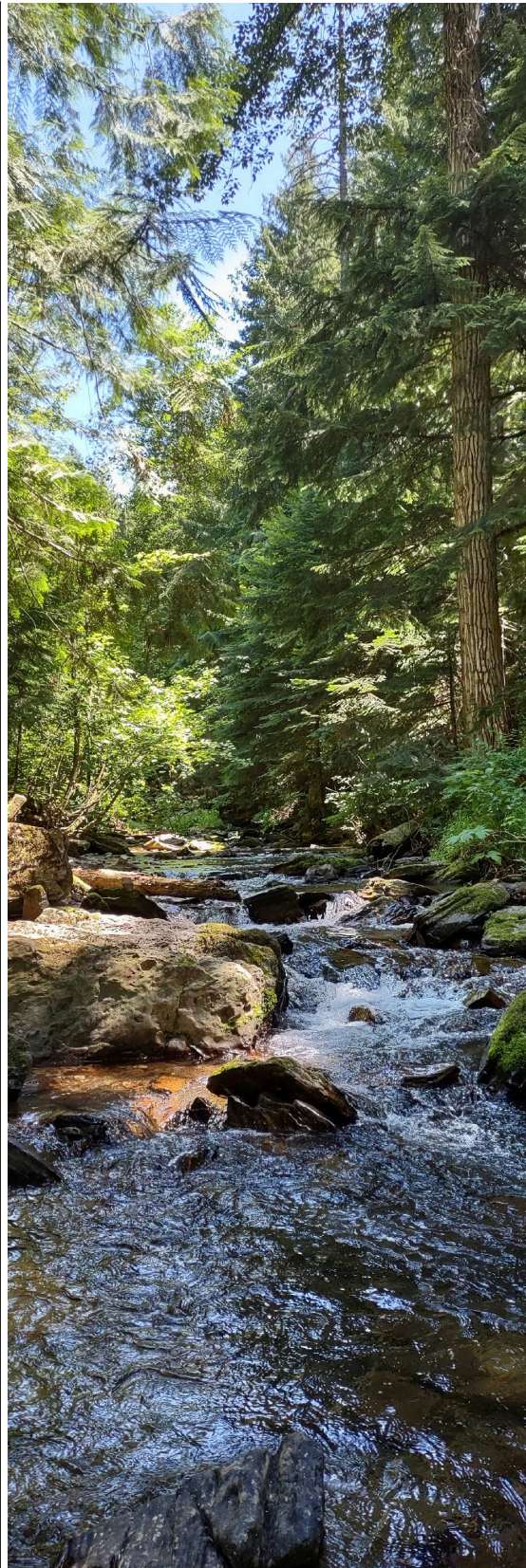
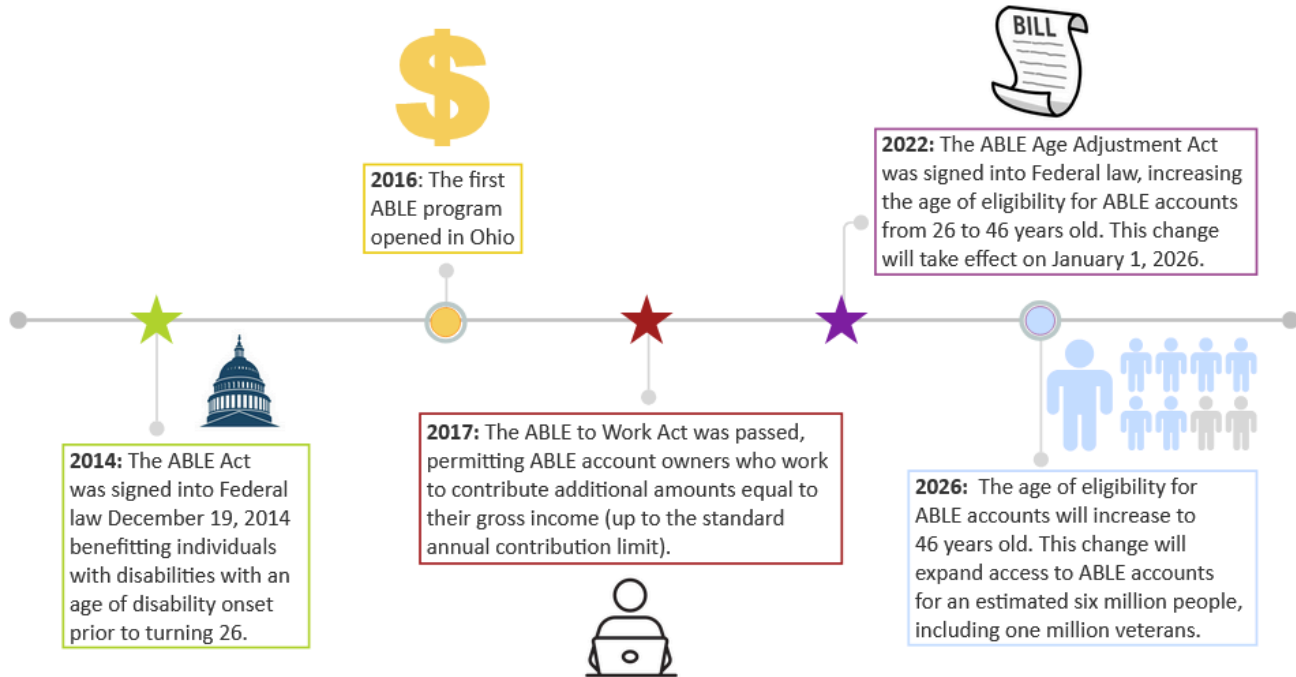


Photo Credit: Sherri Boelter, Post Falls

*U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates

ABLE Act

What is the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act? ABLE is a federal law that allows people with eligible disabilities to save for their everyday needs and prepare for the future without losing their state or federal benefits.

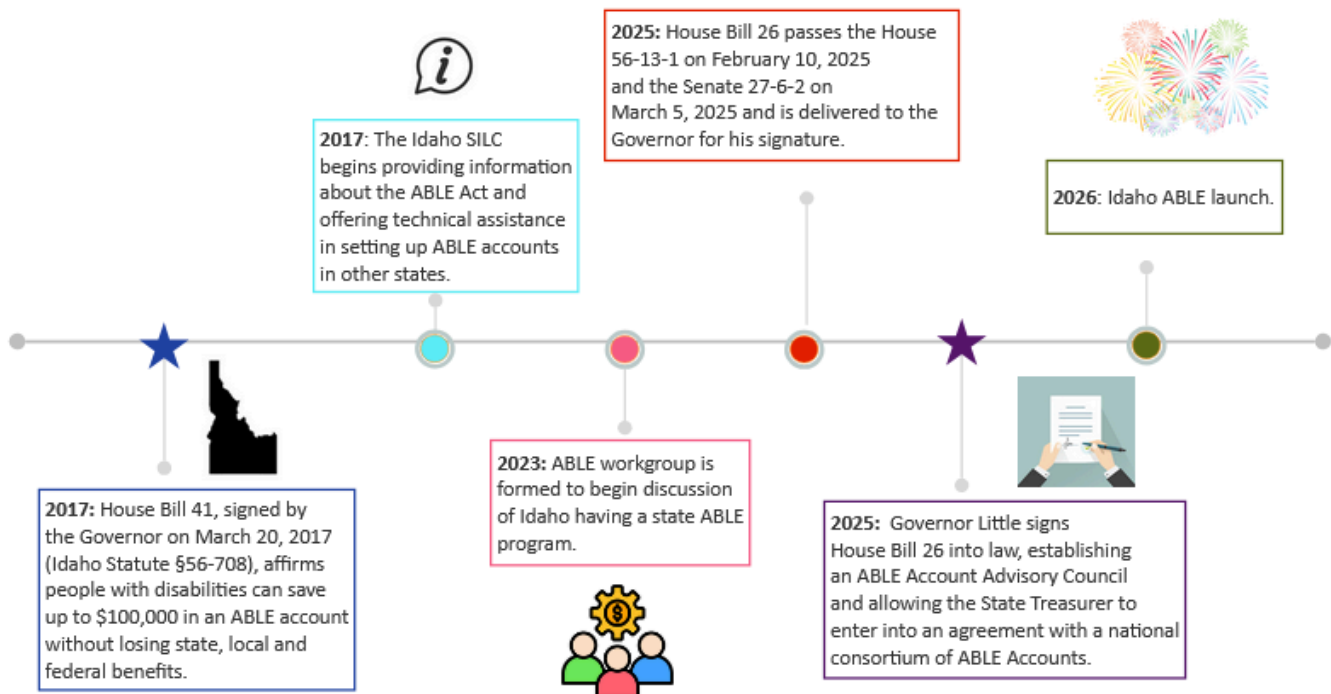


How can ABLE funds be spent?

Personal Support Services	Assistive Technology	Groceries and Utilities
Medical Services	Health, Prevention and Wellness	Employment Training and Support
Education and Training	Transportation	Final Expenses
Rent or Mortgage	Home and Auto Modifications and Repairs	Service and Emotional Support Animal Expenses

ABLE in Idaho

Since July 1, 2017, the SILC has provided one-on-one technical assistance to over 1500 Idahoans and provided outreach through workshops to more than 700 people.



Idaho joined the STABLE national consortium. This allows eligible Idahoans to save toward Qualified Disability Expenses, as determined by the Internal Revenue Service and Treasury Department.

The lack of an Idaho program has been the largest barrier for Idahoans who want to open an account. House Bill 26 removes that barrier for eligible Idaho residents.

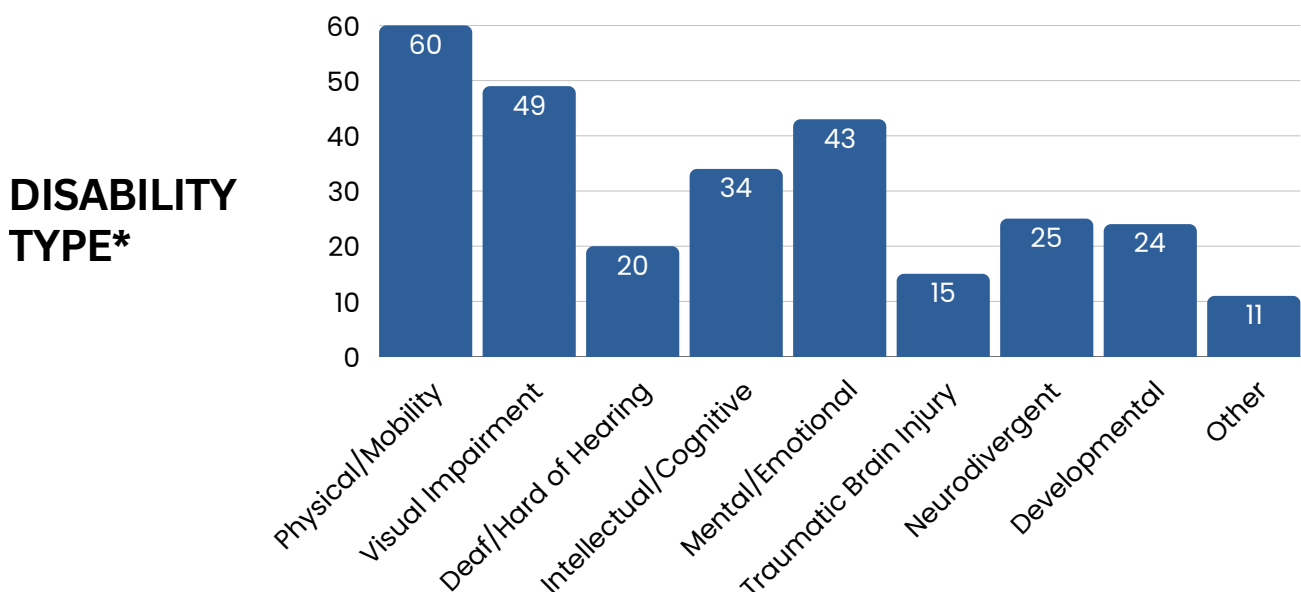
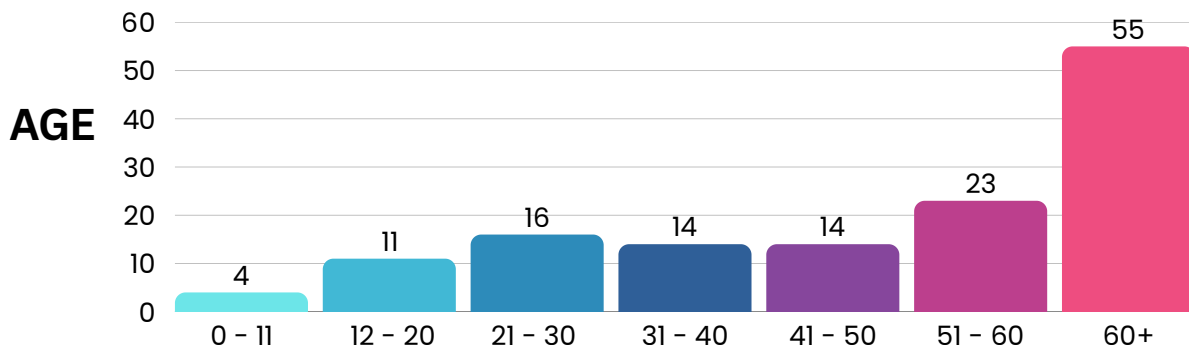


Photo Credit: Jami Davis, Coeur d'Alene

Statewide Needs Assessment

Every three years, the Idaho State Independent Living Council (SILC) works with the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and the Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ICBVI), to develop the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL). The SPIL is a three-year plan that sets goals and guides plans for the delivery of independent living services, systemic advocacy, and public outreach and education based on information gathered from Idaho residents.

In May, 2025, the SILC statewide survey launched. As of September 30, 2025 - 137 responses have been received. The survey remains open until September 15, 2026.



*Respondents are able to choose multiple disability types

What Are Idahoans Saying?

In the past year, what has been the biggest challenge related to your disability, that has limited your independence and/or participation in the community?

- Lack of public transportation
- Limited accessible, affordable housing options
- Insufficient income and financial assistance to meet basic needs
- Shortage of trained in-home caregivers
- High medical costs and limited access to providers
- Social isolation
- Employment barriers and lack of accommodations in the workplace
- Inaccessible public spaces and digital tools
- Lack of ASL interpreters and accessible communication options
- Difficulty accessing services due to complex systems and lack of information
- Lack of empathy and understanding



Needs
Assessment
Survey
Spanish



Needs
Assessment
Survey
English

This word cloud depicts the answers that Idahoans use repeatedly to answer this survey question

What Are Idahoans Saying?

If you were able, what change would you make in Idaho to improve life for people with disabilities?

Strengthen Caregiver Support and Workforce Development

- Provide better training for caregivers (e.g., using Hoyer lifts, working with diverse disability needs).
- Increase caregiver pay and allow caregivers to work directly for clients to ensure fair compensation.
- Ensure caregivers have access to health insurance, dental care, and sick leave, recognizing the demanding nature of their work.
- Address caregiver shortages caused by low wages and lack of benefits.

Expand Access to In-Home and Community-Based Services

- Improve access to in-home care for people on Medicaid.
- Expand Medicare coverage to include in-home support services.
- Increase public awareness and education so people with disabilities know how to access available programs and remain safely in their homes.

Financial and Medical Accessibility

- Make financial assistance easier to access.
- Cap costs of medications to reduce financial strain for individuals with disabilities.

Accessibility and Inclusion

- Improve building accessibility statewide.
- Increase educational outreach to Idahoans about disability awareness and inclusion.

Transportation Equity

- Expand affordable and accessible public transportation, especially in rural areas, to ensure people with disabilities can participate fully in community life.

Photo Credit: Tara Rowe, Twin Falls County

The Independent Living Philosophy

The Independent Living (IL) philosophy redefines independence - not as doing everything alone, but as having control over one's life.

Culture and outdated beliefs often tell us that people with disabilities should be cared for by experts.

The Independent Living philosophy tells us that people with disabilities are the best experts on their own lives AND with the right support (i.e.: communication or physical access in a way that works for them), can direct their own lives.

We often challenge assumptions simply by our existence and participation in not just our own families and communities, but even our own lives. Independent Living helps us choose the life we want to live, how we interact with the world around us and to expect the respect of others.



People with disabilities are not to be pitied or revered any more or less than anyone else. Disability is a natural part of life. It isn't a deal breaker. We may move, learn, communicate, work and play differently. Like anyone else, our joy, pain, success, failure and accomplishments are ours. We know ourselves. We know our lives.

Independent Living means we thrive through the same interdependence of family, friends, co-workers, acquaintances and community as our non-disabled peers. It means we make decisions that turn out well and some that don't. We don't ask for, we demand, the same dignity of risk that our non-disabled peers take for granted.

We. Choose.

How We Do Disability Advocacy

The Idaho SILC is comprised of volunteers, most of whom have disabilities. They are advocates with varying levels of experience in self-advocacy and speaking up for others. Some are just beginning to find and use their voice, while others are experienced advocates who actively represent both themselves and the broader disability community. There are also staff from the three Centers for Independent Living who serve on the Council and four non-voting members who come from state agencies. We value the input of all members and lift up community members who bring real life experience to their advocacy work.

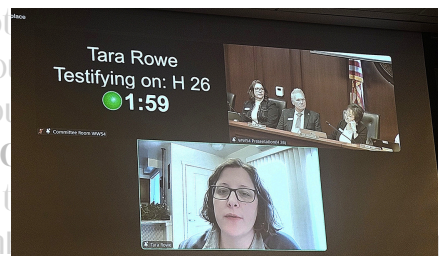
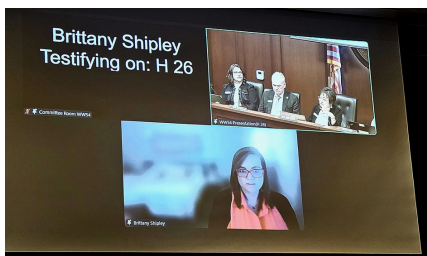
Disability advocacy involves educating policymakers - such as legislators, members of Congress, and city council members - about how laws and policies affect people with disabilities.

When advocating as part of an organization like the SILC or a Center for Independent Living (CIL), the goal is to inform and educate, not to influence votes or outcomes. This distinction is important because:

- **Individuals** can freely express opinions, such as saying, “Don’t vote for House Bill XYZ.”
- **Publicly funded organizations**, however, are restricted. If they attempt to influence legislation, it is considered lobbying, which cannot be done using public funds.

Council members may still advocate as private citizens, but they must be clear that they are speaking on their own behalf, not as representatives of the SILC.

NOTHING about us without us. Nothing ABOUT us without us. Nothing about US without us. Nothing about us WITHOUT us. Nothing about us without US. NOTHING



ABOUT us without us. Nothing about US without us. Nothing about us WITHOUT us. Nothing about us without US. NOTHING about us without us, Nothing ABOUT

Council members testifying, on their own behalf, in support of Idaho ABLE legislation

During the second half of FFY2025, six SILC members - none of whom are employed by the state or a Center for Independent Living - contacted policymakers more than 45 times.

They shared personal stories and insights about how Medicaid helps them manage chronic health conditions, access necessary medications, and maintain their mental health. They also emphasized the importance of:

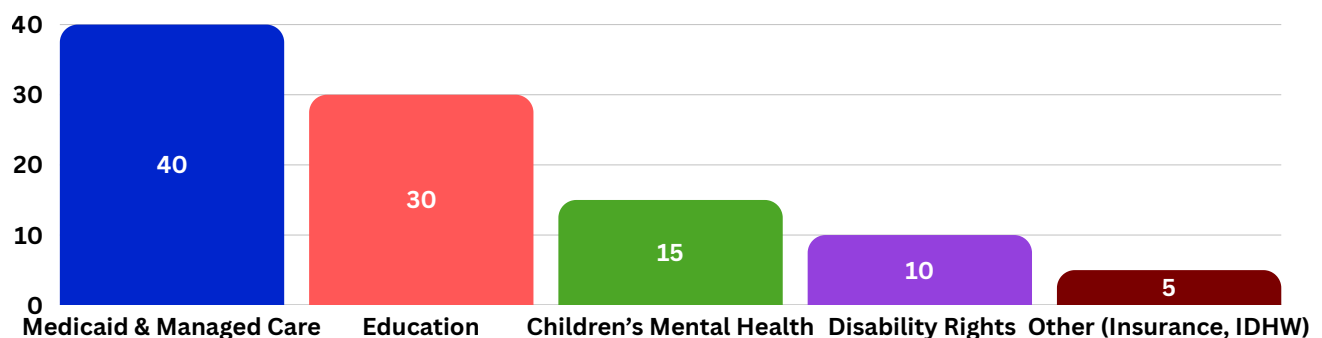
- Inclusive education for children with disabilities
- Community-based placements for children with disabilities in the foster care system
- Accessible healthcare that meets individual needs without adding unnecessary bureaucratic barriers
- The challenges of working through managed care organizations to get the care coordination needed to maintain health and wellbeing
- Predatory activities of health insurance companies regarding Medicare supplemental insurance

In conversations with Idaho's congressional delegation, legislators, and local policymakers, SILC disability advocates also highlighted the urgent need for reliable transportation in rural areas - especially for individuals who cannot drive due to vision loss, cognitive disabilities, or financial hardship.

Perhaps most importantly, disability advocates engaged in advocacy in ways that worked best for them. Some made phone calls, others sent emails, and several met directly with policymakers. Many attended listening sessions and town halls - gathering information and speaking up when they felt ready and comfortable to do so.

Disability advocates learn from and teach each other and the broader community that living with a disability is just that - living. We are a vital thread in the fabric of our communities. When the doors are easier for us to get through, they open to a world where everyone is valued and welcome.

Topics of Contact





Idaho State Independent Living Council

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