

Ezra Nelson

Mar 3, 2023

Dear Co-Chairs Campos, and Valderama and Committee Members,

I found out about my challenges/disabilities in my early to mid-'40s. Growing up not knowing about them prior to that but I knew that something was different about me. I was chronically homeless for a very long time, and attempted to start a business when I was homeless to show that in our journeys, we determine ourselves. So, I figured I would write my own tale and not let my disabilities determine my outcome. That did not succeed, however. I was able to get on SSI after many attempts to show them I needed to be on it. I would later be introduced to my local Center for Independent Living (LILA), experiencing the services offered through their main office as well as through their mental health drop-in center. Both helped me out more than they can even realize. I was at a very low point in my life and knew about my challenges but did not know how to work through them since I did not trust counselors. Having a Peer Support Specialist (someone who actually has life experience) through LILA was great because I felt like someone finally got me. I later became an employee for LILA and now I get to help make a difference for members of my community with disabilities, survivors of trauma, and the Autistic community. I am very grateful that LILA allowed me to be a participant in their mental health drop-in center when I was homeless and later on to give me a job. I believe that LILA helps people with all sorts of disabilities and even saves lives. I respectfully request that the Committee funds the 2.6 million dollar request for CIL pay equity. Please help us keep Centers for Independent Living thriving so that we can continue to help people with disabilities.

Best regards,

Ezra Nelson , PSS

LILA Independent Living Alliance