**disABILITY LINK – Legislative and Public Policy Quarterly Report**

**January 2017 – Immediate Issues**

*“Change Happens at the Speed of Thought”* is an interesting bumper sticker, however, it is likely that familiar topics will be included in the Legislative and Public Policy Report for some time to come – each report cannot contain information on every topic impacting the disability community, this quarter’s report includes topics with a particular emphasis for advocacy in 2017….

**Expanding IL in GA -** there are about 50, approximately a third of Georgia’s 159 counties, I million people, 14% of Georgians with disabilities, that are unserved by a Center for Independent Living – the Georgia Legislative Session begins on January 9, 2017, and advocacy is underway, including an Independent Living (IL) Advocacy Day on February 1st (more details to follow), for Georgia’s General Assembly to invest $750,000 to expand the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) so that everyone has access to the programs and services that CILs provide – services that address barriers to accessing education, employment, healthcare, housing, and transportation - helping people to help ourselves; supporting people with disabilities towards our own definitions of independence….able to speak for ourselves, be in control of our own lives, find the assistance we might need without giving up self-determination - CILs and their programs might be small, but the impact is big…in FY 2015, the individuals the CILs assisted to achieve their independence included 83% who report greater independence because of the CIL (for example, “I can read my own mail because the CIL helped me to get a magnifying screen”) – 73% who report having learned to “speak up” (for example, “When I want to take care of personal business, I can now handle it for myself without having to wait on my daughter”) - and 55% who say that the services received kept them out of a nursing facility (for example, “I could not have stayed at home without the ramp the CIL helped get me”).

**Strengthening IL nationally** - simultaneously, the Independent Living (IL) community is pleased with the 2014 passage of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act contained therein - this historic bill created the Independent Living Administration (ILA), where IL advocates believe that the Independent Living Program will flourish knowing that Centers for Independent Living (CILs) stand ready to take on the challenges and opportunities of integrating the additions and changes included in WIOA - in order to effectively carry out the additional core services as authorized in this legislation and to strengthen America’s Independent Living Program, it has been determined that additional funding of $200 million will be required in the 2017 budget for the Independent Living line item, and in particular the new 5th core service authorized by WIOA in Title 5…transition, defined as:

a) Facilitating the transition of individuals with significant disabilities from nursing homes and other institutions to home and community based residences;

b) Providing assistance to individuals with significant disabilities who are at risk of entering institutions so that the individual may remain in the community; and

c) Facilitating the transition of youth (including students) who are individuals with significant disabilities, who are eligible for individualized education programs under section 614(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1414(d)), and who have completed their secondary education or otherwise left school, to post-secondary life, including employment.

This $200M funding request will restore devastating cuts to the Independent Living Program, make up for inflation costs, address the increased demand for independent living services, and fund transition, the new core service.

**Independent Living and Black Lives Matter** – the disability community is a diverse “minority” and is active in being as inclusive as possible – the high number of people with disabilities (in particular African American men with disabilities) involved in fatal police related shootings demands attention – actions include a collaborative approach (locally including Black Lives Matter of Atlanta, Rise Up Atlanta, Mental Illness is not a Crime, Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network, NAACP of DeKalb, and others) and recognition that this systemic issue will not simply be addressed by more police training – National Council on Independent Living (NCIL)’s Diversity Committee (<http://www.ncil.org/we-cant-breathe-the-deaf-disabled-margin-of-police-brutality-project/>) have produced a “We Can’t Breathe” Video and Tool Kit, <http://www.ncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/11-18-16-We-Cant-Breathe-Toolkit1.pdf> to support this life-saving advocacy.

**The politics might change, but the issues remain** – ADAPT’s Open Letter to President Elect Trump makes the succinct case for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all members of the disability community….protect our freedom and liberty, protect our lives, assure access to vital healthcare services, eliminate **discriminatory ableist standards in federal labor law, protect the rights of Americans with disabilities, and stop the torture of disabled Americans,** <http://www.adapt.org/main.trump> - eliminating the physical, legal, programmatic and attitudinal barriers to equal rights.

Please contact Linda Pogue, disABILITY LINK’s Disability Rights and Program Director, at GreenPogue@disABILITY LINK.org or 404-687-8890 x114, with any questions or comments – thank you!