



The Maine Statewide Independent Living Council is dedicated to ensuring that citizens with disabilities have control over their lives and environments with equal access to options, opportunities, and choices as do all citizens.

February 10, 2021

Good Afternoon,

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the committee.

My name is Bethany Mogan. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share with you information about the Maine Statewide Independent Living Council. Our organization is referred to as Maine SILC. Maine SILC is a nonprofit organization that is not contained within any State agency.

Maine SILC is dedicated to ensuring individuals with disabilities have control over their lives and their environments, with equal access to options, opportunities, and choices as do all citizens.

Maine SILC stems from the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. As a result of this Act, the inception of Centers for Independent Living (CIL), Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), and Statewide Independent Living Councils (SILCs) were created. In fact, there are over 250 Centers for Independent Living across the United States. Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine each have one CIL. Maine's Center for Independent Living is Alpha One. Then there is only one SILC per State. Maine SILC seeks to reach their goals by influencing public policy, supporting opportunities to live independently in their chosen community.

I would like to share why the Independent Living movement is so important to me. Keep in mind this is a movement and is not residential in nature.

I am a Maine native. I have two older sisters neither have a disability. My parents had the same expectations of me as my sisters. I was born with a form of Muscular Dystrophy called Spinal Muscular Atrophy and have never been able to walk independently. At the age of 10, I started using a power wheelchair for mobility. I attended public schools at the time children with disabilities were being mainstreamed.

In high school, I wanted to be like my sisters, so I asked my mother if I could work. I found a data entry job that I worked part time after school. My Senior year, in addition to my data entry job, I took on another job as a service clerk. I held these two jobs and made honor roll throughout that year. I had also decided early on that I wanted to go to college. I applied and was accepted to the University of Maine, Farmington. During my orientation, I met with professors, administrators and peers. I would be the first person with a disability to live in the dorms and attend classes. The Administrators took my mother and I to the side saying that because of the harsh winters, I would only be able to attend the Fall Semesters. In other words, it would take me 8 years to complete a 4-year degree! Neither my mother nor I found that to be acceptable. We pushed the school to think outside of the box and figure out a way I could obtain my degree in 4 years. Here's a visual for you – on one occasion I followed a snow blower to class!!! Not embarrassing at all. I obtained my bachelor's degree in 4 years.



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It was challenging to say the least in finding jobs. For me, personally, I would tell interview committees to ask me anything they wanted even if it was about my disability. I would rather be asked if I had the ability to perform a task or not than for them to make assumptions. By nature, I am a problem solver. I have looked at life that if there is a problem, there is a solution, it's just a matter of finding it!

In August, 2018, I was offered the position of being Executive Director for the Maine Statewide Independent Living Council. It has been an honor and a privilege. I hope that I am able to represent the disability community in a positive, motivating way. And that change can happen, it takes time, effort and passion to get there.

I would like to congratulate you on your appointment and re-appointments to serve areas all across the State. I believe you wouldn't be here unless you had a passion for making change for the better. It won't be easy to get there, but with hard work, waiting to decide the outcome before you have all the information to make an informed decision, the accomplishment will feel much better.

One last thought, as we all are struck by COVID, and the various events of the last year. Life is not a contest. One person is no better than another, one disability is not better or worse than another. It is all relative, you have to live your own life and not someone else's. People with disabilities should be treated with dignity and respect as should all people.