The Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) convened a virtual meeting via ZOOM on Thursday June 25, 2020.

**Attendance**

Council: Dora Easterling, Denise Wardle, Sandi Klink, Sidney McDonald, Clarissa Williams, Alicia Cone, Janie Hadley, Jack Spencer, Rhonda Crenshaw, Edward Mitchell, and Lisa Suttles. ABSENT: Nicole Craig.

Public: Beth James, Brandon Brown, Katherine Moore, Carla Elliott of Chattanooga, Cheryl Zuckerman VR of Chattanooga, Jean-Marie Lawrence of Chattanooga, Becky Allen of Disability Rights of Knoxville Tennessee, Cheyenne Lindsey as sign language interpreter and Tiffany Kelley representing Division of Rehabilitation (DRS) Leadership. ABSENT: Cindy Miles, DRS Liaison and Paula Knisley, DRS Leadership.

**Welcome**

Chair Sandi Klink called meeting to order at 9:05 am Central time. She welcomed attendees and thanked them for attending virtually.

**Minutes**

Council reviewed minutes. An error was noted and once corrected, were approved. Jack Spencer made motion to approve the minutes as amended and Edward Mitchell seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

**Treasurer’s Report**

FFY 2020 Budget/Financials

Denise Wardle presented an update on FFY 2020 year-to-date financials. The Travel line item had a larger than usual expense for the first of the FFY 2020 budget due to the APRIL conference. Clarissa Williams made motion to approve the treasurer’s report as presented and Rhonda Crenshaw seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

**DSU Membership Report, DSE Report & Update:**

Paula Knisley was unable to attend the meeting; however, Tiffany Kelley reported in her absence. Due to COVID-19, remote services have been provided. VR is working on a plan for re-entry and has been phasing in staff. Those staff have been meeting with clients by appointment only, while wearing masks and maintaining social distancing. Staff members temperature is taken, and questions are answered as they enter the office building. Masks are available for Staff and customers. Staff who can work from home will continue to do so, and may come to the office for printing, etc. The Administrative Assistant will schedule staff who need to come to the office. Status update: For the FFY 2020, there have been 3,111 VR applications and for the SFY 2020 (since July 1) there have been 4,540. The currently active client count is 8,268 with an average caseload size of 113. VR is working on increasing outreach and awareness that we are still serving customers. Applications and referrals have decreased recently. Successful closures for SFY are 1,380 and 923 for the FFY. Tiffany Kelley reported she had reached out a month ago to the Governor’s office for the status on the SILC nominations; but have had not updated. Lisa Suttles asked how many membership nominations are currently on hold. Tiffany Kelley replied that she did not have that information and will get it for the group.

**Director Report:**

Dora Easterling reported that she has now been the SILC Director for one year. She has been participating in the ILRU Training for new SILC Directors with Ann McDaniel. She has requested Jeremy Morris from Ohio and Kathy Cooper as her mentors. She has been meeting with them weekly on Zoom. They have reviewed the SILC of TN bylaws, forms, etc. and the mentors have been very complimentary and did propose several tweaks. Ms. Easterling reported that she completed her training in June 2020 with 260 hours of training.

The SPIL update: Quarterly, each CIL will submit their report. The database has been very helpful. Ms. Easterling will take each CILs report and compile the comprehensive report. A copy of this report was emailed to each Council member. Several SPIL goals have been met; however, there will always be goals that we cannot meet. The Consumer Needs Assessment helped determine the individual needs as well as systemic needs. With the SILC and all CILs using the same database now, this helps with the reporting.

Financial Findings: Ms. Easterling reported that the IL Service Grant Award information has not always been transparent from the DSE. Now it is posted on the SILC and ACL website. Ms. Easterling has completed training with Ann McDaniel on how to interpret the financial portion. It was determined that the SILC has not been utilizing all the funds available. Ms. Easterling contacted Kevin Wright, Chief Operations Officer of the DSE to discuss this. Part B funding for the CILs went up from $22,500 to $46,800. There is still a $35,000 error from previous years. The FFY contract budgets were submitted based on last year’s amounts; therefore, an amendment may be required as new funding information comes out.

SPIL Update: Ms. Easterling shared her screen so that all attendees could review the 2021-2023 Proposed SPIL goals and objectives. She reported that the IL network has already started upgrading the technology with the goal of providing effective statewide training. For example, JCIL offers ASL classes and these could be viewed statewide. We are keeping statewide-ness in mind to hopefully provide resources for the unserved and underserved population across Tennessee. This technology will also allow for the sharing of best practices as an IL network. Goal #3 for Emergency Preparedness. We started addressing this plan before the tornados and COVID. The plan is to provide consumers with information and supports they need to be prepared in the event of an emergency. What paperwork to take with them, where they can go, what they need, etc. Ms. Easterling noted that this SPIL is very enormous and robust. She reviewed the indicators and assurances for the SILC as well as the DSE. She then opened the floor for questions, comments, and discussions. Lisa Suttles asked if the SPIL is always a 3-year plan. It is except for this current year extension due to the changes that ACL put into the template. The new SPIL should go into effect on 10/1/2020. Jean-Marie Lawrence of Chattanooga asked if those who are currently with Emergency Management Services could aid the CILS with the consumers. This assistance was enthusiastically accepted. Jack Spencer noted that he knows a local media representative who would like to do a news story about the new SPIL. Ms. Klink agreed that this would be a positive step.

**Old Business**: Ms. Easterling reported that we no longer have the SILC office. Empower utilized it until the lease ran out. Then Empower leased another, larger office in the same complex, which was the other previous SILC office. SILC donated the furnishing to Empower for all the assistance they gave in the move. Since there is no more lease expense for the SILC, this will provide more funds for the CILs use for outreach.

**New Business**

**SPIL Approval:**

The floor was opened for questions, comments, and discussion of the SPIL. Lisa Suttles of Chattanooga expressed her concern that since the SPIL is for three years, that Chattanooga would not be included for that time-period and she is anticipating changes soon. Ms. Easterling noted that the current CIL in Chattanooga was offered the opportunity to participated and they declined. They are still a part of the IL Network; they are just not receiving Part B funds from the DSE. Ms. Suttles stated that Chattanooga citizens have expressed concern and would like change and would like to see Chattanooga rejoin the SPIL. It was noted that the SPIL can possibly be amended if that occurs. Ms. Suttles requested that the minutes reflect her concern. There was considerable discussion about options. If funding is pulled from an existing CIL, the monies will remain for use in the community. A Request for Proposal would need to be done to allow any interested agencies the opportunity to start a CIL. Any interested agency would have to have a plan of operation, and a board of directors. Jack Spencer moved that we take a roll call vote. Denise Wardle seconded the motion.

Edward Mitchell: Vote to proceed as written

Rhonda Crenshaw: In favor, proceed as written

Lisa Suttles: Opposed

Jack Spencer: In favor

Sidney McDonald: Opposed

Denise Wardle: Aye, proceed as written

Clarissa Williams: Aye, proceed as written

Sandi Klink: Aye, proceed as written

Aye: 6. Opposed: 2. Action: SPIL will pass as written.

Various comments were made that we all support Chattanooga and individuals with disabilities in the area. We are in support of having a positive program in Chattanooga. Several members offered the names of advocacy individuals who may be able to assist.

**Membership and Applicants:**

Ms. Easterling reported that we will be losing 3 SILC members in November: Alicia Cone, Lisa Suttles, and Janie Hadley. There have been 3 names submitted for consideration. Ms. Easterling has contacted Wanda Willis and Kevin Wright to ask their assistance in who will replace Ms. Cone and Ms. Hadley as representatives for the state agencies. It was discussed that the SILC would like more input/control on who is assigned as members. The consensus is that having the State be the governor’s contact person takes away the autonomy of the SILC. Ms. Easterling is currently in classes regarding this. This is not a bylaws issue, but a policy/procedure issue. Ms. Klink stated that this discussion is to continue and hopefully can be moved on in the next Quarterly meeting.

**Announcements/Public Comment:**

Jack Spencer reported that he attended a community meeting/rally with over 300 people in attendance. He was able to present on disability issues.

Lisa Suttles reported that in Chattanooga, paratransit ridership is down due to COVID-19. They have started delivering food to the elderly and disabled. They have delivered almost 1,300 meals in the past few months. When the tornado hit the area, many people were displaced. She noted that people in nursing homes have been moved to hotels.

Edward Mitchell reported that for Juneteenth, he was approached by the Tennessee Council for Developmental Disabilities to share his story on Facebook. His accident was the result of a hit-and-run. His story will be on podcasts on ABLE and on a you tube series out of Berkley.

TARP: Denise Wardle reported that TARP has been providing all core services remotely. They conduct screenings at the door for equipment exchange. They have been providing essentials bags that contain: visors, masks, hand sanitizer, pulse oximeter, and thermometer. They have no events scheduled at this time.

dRC: Katherine Moore reported they have been delivering food and life sustaining items to individuals. They assessed the needs of individuals in the community by phone and email surveys. They do have an in-person staff meeting on Fridays. They are not open to the public. They do have their equipment loan program available. They plan to change their ADA Celebration from July to October.

Empower TN: Brandon Brown reported they have moved to the old SILC location: 2601 Elm Hill Pike, Suite O as their “for now” location. They really need more room than this location offers. Since the March tornado and then the COVID-19 quarantine, they have been providing services remotely. They have providing housing information, equipment, access to services, and virtual peer support and training. They have hired Evan Espy as their Technology and Access Coordinator. Empower is updated all their internal IT to assess the needs of the rural and underserved areas. They will soon be hiring an I&R Coordinator. Mr. Brown noted that he has been with Empower for five years and his initial goal of having a $1 million-dollar budget has been reached, through the CARES Act funding and the additional Part B funds. They have been providing individuals with personal protective equipment and other needs and supplies. They have been “gap filling” other services that individuals cannot get from other agencies.

JCIL: Beth James reported that they are offering services remotely. They have been providing masks and wellness kits. They have had 80-90 requests. They have conducted a needs assessment regarding COVID related needs. They have been giving out gift cards for food and purchasing tables with CARES Act monies. They just completed a six-week diabetes training virtually. They had 42 new consumer records started yesterday. They have partnered with Homeless Solutions, as 80% of their consumers have disabilities. JCIL donated masks, hand sanitizers, and disinfectant. They are getting people into housing; but they still need supplies, especially hand sanitizers and thermometers. JCIL’s budget is also nearing $1 million. They are excited about the new technology and the digital classroom options. They do not have any in-person meetings planned at this time. They have not yet scheduled their ADA Celebration. There are approximately 20 consumers hospitalized with COVID presently. JCIL is working to get individuals out of any group settings. TARP was donated 7 gallon drums of sanitizer and they shared it with JCIL. They are working to get this bottled and to the public.

MCIL: Sandi Klink reported they are providing services remotely as well. The MCIL staff meet in person every Monday for “lunch with the boss” to update each other on events. MCIL is using Instacart to deliver food, rental assistance, computers/tablets. They are working on a flyer to distribute. They expect a huge influx of applications as result of this. MCIL’s ADA Celebration will be conducted virtually on 7/24 via Zoom. They are currently conducting two support groups via Zoom. Those without computer access, attend by phone. They are still providing ramps and widening doorways. They are making sure the contractors wear masks and are careful when entering individual’s homes.

Disability Rights of Tennessee: Becky Allen reported that her agency will be contacting the CILs to determine what services they are providing with CARES Act funds and what those funds are being used to purchase. Since it is election season, Ms. Allen asked that the CILS assist with providing voting information to consumers, virtually across the state. Ms. Allen addressed concerns about TRAC in Chattanooga. She reported that DRT has filed a complaint with their Regional Administration office in Atlanta and with the Office of Inspector General with ACL. They have received IRS 990 forms back 5 years. They have called, conducted visits, interviewed individuals and entities who have concerns. They had previously contacted ACL in 2019; but received no feedback. They have requested an “in-depth review” by ACL. DRT has strong concerns that the 10-county area is not being served. Another entity has also filed a formal complaint against TRAC.

Rehabilitation Services: Tiffany Kelley reported that Paula Knisley will be retiring on 6/30/2020.

Jean-Marie Lawrence reported that she is on the Council with the State Council for Disabilities. She is a resident of Chattanooga. She is a person with a disability. She stated that she has lived in Chattanooga since 2004. She reached out to TRAC when she was in college and as an adult, and never received any services from them. She was told that since she was a VR client; they “could not help her, VR should”. She has attempted to contact them recently and the phone was not answered. The TRAC Board meetings have been “cancelled indefinitely”. She would like to see the development of a working CIL in Chattanooga. Many want to be active and independent in their community and are not able to get information from TRAC. She is working to develop a board and has every intention of having a very diverse board and are getting ready to apply when an RFP comes out. She stated they have the leadership. She has been getting cleaning supplies and PPE out to persons with disabilities. She is having difficulty locating enough of these and asked if anyone has any resources to let her know.

Carla Elliott of Chattanooga reported that she was diagnosed with arthritis 48 years ago when she was 7 years old. She has not been able to get services through TRAC. She has been told that since she does not have an intellectual disability, she does not meet guidelines for services. She can drive using a booster seat. She is 4’11” tall. She has asked to volunteer with TRAC and was told that she was not needed. She expressed a dire need for IL services in Chattanooga.

Cheryl Zuckerman of Chattanooga reported that she is deaf; but as a late-deafened person, has intelligible speech. She reported that she does have a job and wanted to ensure that Chattanooga has a CIL that is active and does not move around. She contacted them to see what services they can provide that VR does not and told them that VR is focused on work-related needs not IL services. She has been researching how a new CIL can be started. ACL has informed her it is part of a formula grant so not competitive. She asked how this is used in Tennessee. Sandi Klink of MCIL told her that Part C funds are from ACL and is where most CILS get most of their funds. Discussion from other CILS was held about how funds are obtained. It was noted that a CIL would have to have their Part C grant revoked before an RFP could be initiated. It was noted that an entity should be a 501c3 and provide IL services, even though they are not a Federally funded CIL. It was noted that a non-profit could be established with its own board and secure funding to provide IL services, build your staff and volunteers. It was advised that they understand that there are some things that funds cannot be used for; it is up to the funding source. For example, no direct funds from the federal government can be used for direct services. These funds are to be used for administrative expenses only. In this instance, I&R can be provided, and they can work with other agencies to provide services. They can provide certain training as well.

**Adjourn:** Meeting adjourned at 11:34 a.m. CST. Jack Spencer made the motion. Denise Wardle seconded the motion. Unanimously approved.

Next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Thursday August 27, 2020 at Homewood Suites Nashville Airport from 9 a.m. until noon, Central Standard Time.