

New Mexico Statewide Independent Living Council

State Plan for Independent Living Public Forum (Held Over Zoom)

January 31, 2024 - 1:00 PM

Minutes (Final)

SILC voting Members present at the meeting were Chairperson Marlencia Chee, Vice Chairperson Sarah Michaud, and Peggy Hayes. SILC ex officio members present at the meeting were Lisa McNivin, Jim Salas, and DVR Director Casey Stone Romero. SILC executive director Kathy Cooper was also present.

Guests present included Audra Wilson, Director of Choices Independent Living Center; Michael Murphy, Chief Fiscal Officer for the Independent Living Resource Center; Albert Montoya, Director of the Ability Center for Independent Living; Coby Livingstone, former SILC Chairperson, and Kendra Garcia, New Vistas employee.

Chairperson Chee said, "Kathy, shall we go ahead and get started? It's one o'clock now."

Ms. Kathy Cooper introduced herself, saying she was working with the New Mexico Statewide Independent Living Council. Ms. Cooper thanked the persons present for joining us today. She said this is our State Plan for Independent Living Public forum where we will hopefully get a lot of good feedback on different ways to write the SPIL, what needs to be put in the SPIL, and what will benefit disabled folks in New Mexico.

1. Introduction and Overview of the Independent Living Network and State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL)

Ms. Cooper introduced Ms. Marlencia Chee as the Chairperson of the Statewide Independent Living Council.

Chairperson Chee said she was just elected Chair. She said she has been working with Ms. Cooper to get a lot of the forums and meetings going. She said she appreciated you all joining us today and she said that we value your input to the questions that we will be asking today. She concluded by saying welcome everyone and thank you for joining us.

Ms. Cooper said the whole reason that we are here today is the State Plan for Independent Living; and we call that the SPIL. She said the SPIL is a state plan. She said every state has to have a state plan and that it is done every three years. She said the Statewide Independent Living Council is responsible to develop the SPIL along with the centers for independent living. She said the SILC is also responsible to monitor and

evaluate the SPIL. She said the SILC has to be made up of at least 51% persons with disabilities. She said the SILC coordinates across the state with the centers for independent living, the designated state entity, disability organizations, and state agencies. Ms. Cooper then described the work of the centers for independent living, and the five core services. She also said that DVR as the designated state entity was the fiscal intermediary responsible to disperse funds into the IL program and see that the funds are used in an accountable and allowable way.

2. SPIL Questions

Ms. Cooper said they would begin by asking questions and that the information would be used for the State Plan for Independent Living.

1. What is working in your community?

Mr. Salas said New Mexico has a separate blind agency, which he said is the Commission. He said the Commission is a part of the network and has an in-house independent living program and provides services through independent living teachers. He said the Commission has offices in Farmington, Santa Fe, Roswell, Las Cruces, Albuquerque, and serves the entire state. He said the Commission provides really good IL services using state funds in addition to the Part B funds that the Commission receives from the designated state entity and the Older Blind funds that the Commission receives from the Rehabilitation Services Administration. He said in total the Commission spends about \$1 million on the two IL programs.

Chairperson Chee said Jemez Pueblo has the Health and Human Services clinic that takes care of people with disabilities when they are diagnosed, and that it is a whole new lifestyle for them. She said their funding is limited, and that the Health and Human Services director has said that more is needed in the area of independent living. She said the benefits counselor and manager for the program that does home visits with elders was at the SILC meeting in Jemez. She said they expressed there is a need, especially for elders stuck in their homes.

Chairperson Chee said they brought this light to the tribal council and leaders. She said the new administration says there is a need for more independent living services in the community, and that more elders are expressing a need to come out of their homes, and especially for persons who are in wheelchairs. She said another independent living need is for a program on traditional plazas and religious sites accessible for persons with disabilities. Chairperson Chee said there are three individuals who are dedicated to

be a part of the council and are willing to come to meetings. She said they have made connections and that partnerships with persons who provide services to persons with disabilities have been made since the last meeting.

Vice Chair Sarah Michaud reported on New Vistas, saying that one of the things working for New Vistas is partnerships with other agencies. She said the recent wildfires had actually helped to form better partnerships and relationships.

Ms. Cooper said she is taking notes, and that they can always come back. She then moved on to the next question.

2. What are the existing service gaps in your community?

Audra Wilson from Choices Independent Living Center said their gap is with the schools, and that it is hard to do transition. She said it is hard to reach out when they do not want you in their business. She said schools do not reach out and do not want them in the schools.

Ms. Cooper said she got that down.

Vice Chair Sarah Michaud said she seconded what Ms. Wilson said. Ms. Michaud said getting responses from schools is like pulling teeth. She said transportation is another gap, and that available and accessible transportation is an issue, and that transportation to medical appointments is a gap. She said there are rural and frontier communities that do not have personal care assistants.

Ms. Wilson said she totally agreed, saying that only two counties in her area had bus systems and paratransit services. She said Artesia has no transportation.

Ms. Peggy Hayes said transportation is a big issue in Alamogordo, and that the bus no longer goes to Walmart. She said paratransit closes down at 6:00 PM. She said there is no taxi service in Alamogordo.

Ms. Cooper asked about the existing service gaps in the communities of the attendees.

Michael Murphy said, it is not so much in the communities; it is statewide. Mr. Murphy said there are five full counties in New Mexico that are not being served at all with the five core services by any center. He said he thinks that is a huge gap.

Ms. Wilson said she has been at Choices for twelve years and that it has been put in the SPIL every year, but there has been no request for funding and that the SILC is not helping to get funding.

Mr. Murphy said that's a gap; not requesting funding; not pursuing funding.

Ms. Cooper said thank you, adding that she is writing this down.

Mr. Murphy said affordable, integrated, accessible housing is not there.

Ms. Hayes said it is not there in Alamogordo.

Chairperson Chee said a lot of great strides have been made but that there are still some gaps. She said transportation in Jemez has added transportation, and that first priority is given to those going to dialysis. She said Rio Rancho is now coming to Jemez. She said 98 houses are being built, with some being accessible. She said she has spoken to the Farmington independent living Director and that funding is being shared with the tribal community.

Vice Chairperson Michaud said she has noticed that it has become more difficult to provide disability sensitivity or awareness training since COVID. She said businesses do not want to rock the boat. She said this is creating new barriers or recreating old barriers.

Ms. Cooper said they are on a roll and that this is great. She called again for comments on existing service gaps.

Ms. Wilson said people do not want to work anymore and that they are wanting to get on Social Security. She said they are having a really hard time averting them to get a job and our DVR is not working with us. She said people come back and say DVR turned us away. She said they should be able to convince DVR to do those things and it's just not happening.

Ms. Hayes said one thing that has hurt services is that offices are not open anymore. She said the Alamogordo DVR office is closed and that everything is done online.

Ms. Cooper said we can always come back if you think of anything, and she said let's move on to question number 3.

3. If the state had an unlimited pot of money, what services or resources would you like to see?

Ms. Wilson said Michael said it best, you need to open centers everywhere. She said five communities have nothing, and that is a big problem.

Ms. Hayes said transportation and housing.

Vice Chairperson Michaud said she agreed with Ms. Hayes, 24-7 statewide accessible and affordable transportation.

Coby Livingstone said she was in Albuquerque and that she was interested in having more collaboration, problem solving, cost sharing, and agency skills sharing. She described a new initiative at the University of New Mexico Hospital that is working to collaborate with community resources when a patient is discharged. She said more collaboration would be great.

Kendra Garcia said she works at New Vistas and that she would like to reiterate the need for accessible affordable housing. She said transportation would be her second priority. She said she would like to build wraparound services and one-stop shops.

Ms. Hayes said she would like to see advertisement to make the public aware of the independent living centers and their services.

Mr. Murphy said he would like to see accessible, disability-gearred, disability-specific career and vocational job training programs that would give people with disabilities an equal opportunity at employment. He said he would also like to see more money for home and vehicle modifications.

Ms. Hayes said she would like to see more middle income persons eligible for home modifications.

Ms. Cooper went on to question number 4.

4. What organizations would you like to see the IL Network partner with?

Ms. Cooper said the network was the SILC, the centers, and the designated state entity, and she asked what organizations the network should work with more to help people with disabilities.

Mr. Murphy said the Department of Education would be a good start.

Ms. Cooper asked what other organizations everybody should be partnering with.

Ms. Livingstone said long-term care services and area agencies on aging. She said she agreed with Mr. Murphy on the Department of Education.

Ms. Wilson said the Department of Education was a big one.

Ms. Cooper asked about other organizations, saying they did not have to be state agencies. She said they could be community resources or other types of disability stakeholders or organizations not related to disability but that might be a good partner.

Chairperson Chee said one of the places that could be partner with that is not DVR or tribal VR would be Workforce Connections of New Mexico. She said another would be networking with tribal leaders, adding that she works with members of federally recognized tribes in an 80-mile radius who live in cities. She said she works with the Pueblos of Santa Ana, Zia, Santo Domingo, San Felipe, Cochiti, and their Councils and Governors.

Ms. Livingstone said each health insurance company has a worker who is a patient advocate and is a great resource. She said we could really partner with them.

Ms. Wilson said APS and CYFD should be something we look at because children are taken away from people with disabilities so easily. She said those departments can cause serious damage

Ms. Hayes said she agreed 100%.

Ms. Cooper asked again if there were other organizations the IL Network should partner with. There were no responses, so she said let's move on to question 5.

5. What is the best way to get information out to your community?

Ms. Cooper asked what was the best way to get information and knowledge out to the communities.

Ms. Hayes said on Fridays at noon Alamogordo has a radio program that is live out of one of the grocery stores and they let people go on to talk about services or events. She also said a PSA could be placed on the radio.

Ms. Cooper repeated her question.

Chairperson Chee talked about social media efforts, saying she is waiting on the Jemez Governor to approve the Jemez Vocational Rehabilitation social media effort. She said other social media efforts were approved for Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok. She said handing out fliers still works for the Jemez community, and that senior centers are a good place to share information.

Ms. Livingstone said when she was on the SILC before there were some great resources for learning and training of the SILC board and understanding of the whole independent living concept from the Administration for Community Living. She said learning from each other, asking a CEO from another agency you admire.

Ms. Garcia said New Vistas has a Facebook page that New Vistas uses to share information. She said they also do word of mouth. She said she is on the Mayor's Community for Disability.

Ms. Livingstone said social media is the name of the game and that it can reach younger people.

Ms. Wilson said word of mouth is really a big deal and that agencies can help explain independent living services.

Ms. Cooper said those were our questions. She said now we are going to open it up for anyone who wants to add anything or have a comment.

Ms. Livingstone asked if Albert Montoya was still there from Las Cruces. She said he has a lot of interesting things going on at that program. Ms. Livingstone asked Mr. Montoya if there was anything he could add.

Mr. Montoya said good afternoon, and agreed with the use of social media, Facebook, and Instagram. The rest of his comments could not be clearly understood.

Ms. Cooper asked again for any comments or questions.

Ms. Wilson said she thought the biggest thing was funding and that there is never enough money. She said we need the SILC to push for it, and we need DVR to push for it; like, we need the funding for sure.

Mr. Murphy agreed.

Ms. Cooper thanked everyone for coming and sharing your thoughts and ideas. She said I've got a lot of good stuff here. She said what will happen here is that the SPIL drafting will start and once a draft is complete it will go out for public comment. She said that will be posted on the New Mexico SILC's website. She said we'll also ask all of the centers for independent living to share it. She said we'll ask a lot of other organizations and agencies to share it as well and to get that public feedback on the new SPIL for federal fiscal year 25 through 27. She said the notice will be posted on the New Mexico SILC website once that notice is put out and there will be thirty days for that. She said she appreciates everybody's time. She said the New Mexico SILC appreciates everybody's time. She said thank you very much; we're going to get to work on this, so thank you, and have a great afternoon.

Unidentified persons expressed their thanks. Ms. McNivin thanked the interpreters.

The meeting ended after about one hour, three minutes, and twenty-five seconds.

Approved and Electronically Signed this 2nd Day of July 2026.

Paula Seanez, Chairperson
Statewide Independent Living Council