National Federation of the Blind of Idaho

**Dana Ard**, President

1320 E. Washington

Boise, ID 83712

(208) 345-3906

president@nfbidaho.org



**Legislative Fact Sheet**

**Maintaining Quality Independent Living Services for the Blind of Idaho**

Imagine waking up one morning with your vision so limited that you couldn’t see your clock or watch, read information on your phone or make a phone call, read the dials on your stove, and of course, not be able to drive. You get a ride to your eye doctor and find out you are legally blind from an eye condition that is permanent and probably progressive. What would you do? How would this change your life?

Since the 1980’s, the Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, (ICBVI), has provided an independent living program that teaches those who are new to sight loss, or those who have never learned blindness skills, the skills they need to live independently, avoiding institutionalization or over-reliance on family members and others. The ICBVI’s independent living services are unique and different from those provided by programs such as independent living centers or the State Independent Living Council. The ICBVI program is individualized to the needs of the blind person and the training is specific to skills and techniques that blind and visually impaired people require to live in the community and be productive citizens. Examples of these services include orientation and mobility to allow a blind person to navigate the environment, braille which is necessary for record keeping and labeling household items, learning to use voice-over on a smart phone, using special software to operate a computer, purchasing devices such as magnifiers and other low vision aids, computer software, white canes and other appliances for those who cannot afford to purchase them, learning to use transportation systems such as the bus and paratransit to compensate for the inability to drive, referral to other agencies or blindness organizations such as the Idaho Talking Book Program and the National Federation of the Blind.

The State Independent Living Council (SILC) has decided to cut a significant amount of independent living funds to the ICBVI, in order to use them for other independent living services around the state. As of FY2020, the ICBVI could lose up to $130,000. The loss of these funds will result in blind people being placed on waiting lists for services, a decrease in the amount of teaching for independent living clients, and an inability for the agency to purchase blindness specific devices for those who cannot afford to purchase such equipment on their own. The ICBVI will be seeking grants and other options to offset this funding loss, but, most likely, will need to request additional funds from the Idaho legislature next year.

The need for Independent Living services in Idaho is increasing, not decreasing. Idaho is one of the fastest growing states in the union. The increase in population will bring more people who are blind or visually impaired who require agency services. As people live longer, vision loss due to macular degeneration is on the rise. Diabetic retinopathy, the leading cause of blindness in people age 25-54, is also increasing with the rise in diabetes. The ICBVI is the only source of blindness specific independent living services in the state. Without independent living services, blind people become dependent on others and can become vulnerable to victimization. Some people may be placed in assisted living facilities or nursing homes, at the expense of the taxpayers. Many blind people will return to work after receiving independent living services, thus becoming tax payers, not tax takers. Adequate funding for ICBVI’s Independent Living Services will help to keep blind people contributing members of their communities and out of institutions. The National Federation of the Blind of Idaho requests your support of ICBVI’s Independent Living Program to assist the blind of Idaho.