



Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities

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TO: The Honorable Michele McQuigg and Members of the Disability Commission

FROM: Chet Avery, Member, Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities

SUBJECT: Full restoration of the Rehabilitative Services Incentive Fund ("RSIF") for Virginia's Disability Services Boards to the FY02 level of \$912,500 to address gaps in services, support innovative programs, and improve coordination in service delivery for Virginians with disabilities.

DATE: January 9, 2006

The members of the Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities have asked me to request the Members of the Disability Commission to recommend to the Virginia legislature that it support the restoration of the Rehabilitative Service Incentive Fund appropriation for this fiscal year be increased by \$732,500 to the 2002 level of \$912,000 so that each of the Commonwealth's Disability Service Boards can develop projects to address the needs of Virginians with disabilities in their areas.

As a background for this request, in 1994, Virginia's General Assembly approved the creation of the Rehabilitative Services Incentive Fund ("RSIF"), which was designed to promote investment in meeting the needs of individuals with physical and/or sensory disabilities.

The local Disability Services Boards ("DSB") identify unmet or underserved needs through a tri-annual needs assessment report, which uncovers areas for change and improvement to increase the quality of life for individuals with physical and/or sensory disabilities. In addition, the local DSB is charged with the duty of administering the RSIF, which is a reimbursement grant, and is only awarded when a matching local percentage is met. The local match cannot be in-kind services or other state money. Monies may be used to increase service capacity through expanding existing services or creating new services, but more importantly to stimulate model programs, coordinated services systems, and program innovations.

The guiding principles for the Rehabilitative Services Incentive Fund are:

- To serve as a first step in the development of the community-based, consumer-focused service delivery system envisioned by the Commission on the Coordination of the Delivery of Services to Facilitate the Self-Sufficiency and Support of Persons with Physical and Sensory Disabilities in the Commonwealth;
- To establish fiscal incentives for state and local commitment of resources to address needs identified by a DSB for new programs or expanded access to existing services. The State RSIF cannot be used to supplant the existing funding of a service operating in the community. Participation in the RSIF is a local option;
- To provide seed money for program innovation and coordination of services among organizations, jurisdictions, and Disability Services Boards; and
- To enable DSBs to serve as catalysts by leveraging resources for services from multiple private and public sources and to stimulate statewide expansion of models that work.

Up through FY02, the RSIF received an annual appropriation of \$912,500, which was allocated to local DSBs throughout the Commonwealth for both single and multiyear grants (up to three years) development. In FY03, the fund was lowered to \$882,500, but was suspended and withdrawn with only \$182,500 expended and all current and multiyear grants discontinued. The drastic cut was retained in FY04 with only \$182,500 appropriated. Currently, the RSIF is allocated \$180,000 for all DSBs statewide.

As a result, the number of grants awarded has declined significantly over the years and services and opportunities for Virginians in most jurisdictions in the Commonwealth have languished. Statewide, in FY02 there were 69 grants and 17 continuation grants (multi-year), 67 grants and 13 continuation grants in FY03, 13 grants in FY04, and only 12 grants awarded in FY06.

The City of Alexandria has proven that RSIF grants have provided sustainable programs, which have demonstrated long-standing and ongoing benefits to its residents with disabilities. Specifically, past grants have funded an improved reservation system for the DOT Paratransit service, housing grants, talking buses, a pilot test of audible pedestrian traffic signals, and assistive technology at an employment center, which was recognized by the Department of Labor as a national model for implementing and using assistive technology within employment centers.

Moreover, RSIF grants initially supported a disability Employment Counselor in Job Link, Alexandria's employment center and initially paid for a share of the City's Disability Resources Coordinator who among other duties provides staff

support to the Alexandria DSB/ Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities (ACPD). It should be noted that the synergistic effects of the RSIF Grants received by Alexandria contributed to Alexandria being identified by the National Organization on Disability as being one of the Nation's top eleven most accessible cities in the United States.

Other local Disability Services Boards and the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services ("DRS") are interested in restoring this funding for the State's 37 DSBs. Full restoration of funds to \$912,500 would ensure that every local DSB would be awarded an RSIF grant. The current funding of \$180,000 sets up a formula where all local DSBs have to compete with each other instead of working together. The City of Alexandria has not had an RSIF award in the past two fiscal years. The Culpeper Disability Services Board, Eastern Shore Disability Services Board, Fairfax Area Disability Services Board, Jefferson Area Disability Services Board, Rappahannock Rapidan Disability Services Board, West Piedmont Disability Services Board, and DRS have all stated that they support such legislation.

Therefore, based on all of the above considerations, the Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities strongly supports and calls for you to support funding of the RSIF Program by the Virginia General Assembly to fully restore RSIF funding to the FY02 level of \$912,500.