



WASHINGTON

State Independent Living Council

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An open letter to all Washingtonians:

In the aftermath of the tragic shooting in Tucson, Arizona on January 8, the nation has searched for ways to prevent events such as these. There is a tendency to affix blame to individuals and groups. Initially, blame was placed on political extremism. Subsequently, the blame is being affixed to people with disabilities. It has come to light that the shooter likely has a mental illness that seems to have contributed to his indefensible actions. As a result, there are widespread calls to limit the right of people with mental health disabilities.

As a group, people with mental health disabilities are no more likely to commit violent acts than non-disabled persons. While mental health problems can contribute to violence in some instances, it is wrong to condemn an entire group based on the isolated actions of a limited few

The Washington State Independent Living Council (SILC) is distressed at the draconian cutback in resources in recent years to people with disabilities, including those with mental health disabilities. Increasingly people are forced to live on the street as resources are cut. Programs to support some of the most vulnerable people with mental health disabilities in the community are being eliminated. Sometimes the only vehicle for intervention is to break the law because voluntary services are non-existent. For some, a jail cell is better than sleeping on the street without food

Persons with mental health disabilities are among the most stigmatized in our society. We plead with our government and the citizens of Washington State to reconsider reinvesting resources in people with mental health disabilities.

Society will never eliminate all violence in our midst. However, we plead for people to use the lessons from the tragic Arizona shooting to consider how to provide inclusion and support for people with mental health disabilities rather than marginalizing an entire group of people based on isolated events.

For more information on the SILC and Centers for Independent Living, please visit the SILC website at www.wasilc.org.

Sincerely, the Washington State Independent Living Council

Dr. Romel Mackelprang, Chair
Robert Honan, Executive Director