Hello, Dawn and others on the S.I.L.C.:

 I hope this letter finds you well! My name is Gen Landman. We've spoken a little bit before via email, and I attended some Zoom meetings with you this past winter. I'm a volunteer at the R.C.I.L. in Carson City. I've also sometimes been a client in the past (as far back as 2009), and I'm currently a client again. Off the top of my head, I have two stories about Dee Dee Foremaster and the Rural Center for Independent Living that I'd like to add as Public Comment.

 I came to Carson City for the first time in 2009. I was taking a "gap year" away from college to serve with AmeriCorpsVISTA and U.N.R.'s Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities. I was the first person in my family to make it to college, and as a person who would figure out later that they are neurodivergent, I was overstimulated and overwhelmed by college life. So: AmeriCorps it was! As you may know, AmeriCorpsVISTA members receive a "living allowance," which is a type of fixed income, based on the state poverty line. Back in 2009, VISTA members were prohibited from having a second job or even what we now call a "side hustle." I was new in town; my college had been in Oregon. I didn't know anyone in this area except for my supervisors, who were out of town up at U.N.R. anyway. I had found a room to rent through CraigsList, but it turned out to have a lot of hidden costs that I couldn't afford. I needed a safe, affordable new place to live, and I needed it before Rent Came Due again. But I was 21 years old, broke, new at figuring out housing rentals, navigating a new and painful set of P.T.S.D. and anxiety symptoms, and in '09 I hadn't yet figured out that I have autism; I had thought I was "just different." Luckily, I met Dee Dee Foremaster! Dee Dee had me sit with her and listen as she made a call to a prospective landlord. We discussed what she had said/asked and why, and she asked me what questions I had. Then she had me give it a try. She also accompanied me to apartment showings and to meet and negotiate with landlords in person. One landlord called Dee Dee back about renting to me, and the landlord said, "I want to rent to her, but with that income, how can I be sure she's going to pay her rent every month? She's going to need to pay for utilities and buy groceries, and what if she has an emergency?" Dee Dee told that landlord, "Look, she has to live somewhere, and she knows that the first priority is having a roof over her head. The utilities won't matter if she's evicted for not paying her rent, so why pay utilities before paying the rent? She knows that no matter what, you pay your rent first. And she has that AmeriCorps living stipend--it's exactly the same every month, no more, but no less either." After a little bit more negotiation, I had a safe apartment to move into at a rate that even I could afford on my AmeriCorps allowance. Thanks to Dee Dee, I was able to stay in Carson City and complete my AmeriCorps service. Not only did she get me into an apartment; she taught me about housing, budgeting, and negotiation/self-advocacy.

 Fast forward to summer of 2024. I have a handful of exciting job prospects in Carson City and Reno. My housing arrangement (out of state) was to finish up at the end of June. Around the 17th of June, I had arranged housing in Carson City, and spent the following eight days happy as a clam because I was going to have the opportunity to return to this town that feels like home! All of my references had responded to my new landlord and spoken highly of me--and I know this because two of the conversations happened via text message, of which the landlord immediately sent me screenshots. The third reference had been a phone conversation, and my reference called me later, bubbling about how happy she was for me and what sorts of things she had told the landlord about me during their conversation. The landlord and I continued to work on paperwork little by little. But on the 25th, the landlord "flaked" on me--she texted me that she had allowed someone else to move in on the 24th. This left me with less than a week to put together last-minute housing! I continued searching online. Meanwhile, I reached out to Dee Dee for in-person advocacy and support with expediting the process. I'm going to tell you right now that it hasn't been easy. The renter's market has changed drastically in 15 years. 2024 rental rates are just shy of twice as expensive as 2009 rates. The studio apartment Dee Dee found me in 2009 had cost $475/month, and the going rate for a studio in the same building is now $900/month...plus gas, plus electric, each of which require a hefty deposit...and the security deposit...plus an application fee for every apartment for which you want to be seriously considered...plus administrative fees for buildings that are managed by a legitimate real estate company... 2024 housing costs are outrageous! Despite the skyrocketing prices and the fees that seem to be multiplying like bunnies, most landlords require tenants to have a monthly income of at least three times the rent amount. Yet, based on the range of positions I had pursued this summer, it appears that most wages and salaries have risen by only about 15%. Income might as well have stagnated in comparison to the cost of living. All this is to say: I was in danger of becoming homeless. Dee Dee hustled to identify (relatively) affordable places in safe apartment complexes. She asked if I remembered what she had taught me about the questions renters need to ask landlords. I laughed, and I said, "Of course I remember!" It's been fifteen years, and I've honed those skills now--but the thing is, Dee Dee is aware of what's going on with all of her various clients in all of their various life circumstances, she's familiar with her clients' strengths and weaknesses, and she cares that we find stability. Dee Dee even found me a place to stay, temporarily, while we tried to "put a rush on" my housing applications. As I was putting together what felt like a hundred housing applications, I encountered situations where I needed to pay for different fees by money order. Money orders were sort of a foreign currency to me. Dee Dee showed me how to properly fill one out without skipping anything and without writing too much on it. And now...

 ...after what has felt like a mountain range's worth of paperwork...

 ...Dawn, and everybody at the S.I.L.C., I've got some happy news to share! Do you know what happened just this morning? I brought one last money order to my new property manager and picked up a set of three keys: mailbox, laundry room, and front door! With those keys in hand, I began unloading my overstuffed car into an apartment where I can organize my belongings, shower, cook for myself, and even stretch out like a cat if I feel like it. I'd like the S.I.L.C. to understand that I now have a place to call "Home" because Dee Dee has been both advocating for me and making sure I utilize my own skills in self-advocacy.

 There's one more thing I'd like to share with the S.I.L.C.: The R.C.I.L. provides all of the Core Services. It's my understanding that in order to be an official C.I.L., an organization must provide the Core Services of Information & Referral, Individual & Systems Advocacy, Peer Support, Independent Living Skills Training, and Transition Services. As I mentioned before, I've volunteered with the R.C.I.L. as well as been a client. Every time I've been at the R.C.I.L., I've seen Dee Dee Foremaster providing these services and more on a daily basis. On a Monday, she may focus more on one or two types of services than on the others, but by Friday (or often even Saturday), she has provided each of the Core Services to at least one client just about every week. Based on the phone and Zoom conversations between Dee Dee Foremaster and Margaret Marcucci that I've occasionally walked past and been welcomed into, it's my impression that the same thing is happening at Margaret's office in Elko. Now, Dee Dee's 25-year-old nonprofit may be a "new" C.I.L. in terms of governmental assessment, but providing the Core Services is something of which she has been making both an art and a science for a long, long time. As a client whose life has improved through the R.C.I.L.'s services, as a volunteer who has seen the list of 725(b) requirements as well as the documents that demonstrate the R.C.I.L.'s compliance, and as an ordinary person who has witnessed Dee Dee's and Margaret's valiant dedication to their work, I ask the S.I.L.C. to please, please reinstate R.C.I.L.'s 725(b) so that Dee Dee and Margaret may please have the funding to deepen and expand their services. They need the funding because we clients rely on the R.C.I.L. for services.

Thank you.

Kind Regards,

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"If we treat each other as if we are geniuses, artists, and poets, we have a better chance of becoming that onstage." —Del Close

Well-being note:

I sent this email at a time that was convenient for me. If you receive this email outside of your typical working hours, I hope you feel no pressure to read or respond until your schedule permits.