

We the People

LEARNING AND EXERCISING OUR HUMAN RIGHTS

MARCH 2011, PUBLISHED BY

TOPEKA INDEPENDENT LIVING RESOURCE CENTER

ITS TAX TIME AGAIN!

Free Tax Return Preparation for You by Volunteers

The IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA) and the Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) Programs offer free tax help for taxpayers who qualify.

Trained community volunteers may help with special credits, such as Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, and Credit for the Elderly or the Disabled. In addition to free tax return preparation assistance, most sites also offer free electronic filing (e-filing). Individuals taking advantage of the e-file program will receive their refunds in half the time compared to returns filed on paper – even faster when tax refunds are deposited directly into one's bank account.

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program

The VITA Program offers free tax help to low- to moderate-income (generally, \$49,000 and below) people who cannot prepare their own tax returns. *To locate the nearest VITA site, call 1-800-906-9887.*



Tax Counseling for the Elderly

For more information on TCE, call 1-800-829-1040. To locate the nearest AARP Tax-Aide site,

We the People

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Topeka, KS 66603-3300
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(785) 233-1561 FAX
www.tilrc.org



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call 1-888-227-7669 or visit AARP's website at
[http://www.aarp.org/money/taxes/aarp_ taxaide/](http://www.aarp.org/money/taxes/aarp_taxaide/).

Military personnel and their families get free tax help!

Items to bring to the VITA/TCE site to
have your tax return prepared

- **Proof of identification**
- **Social Security Cards for you, your spouse and dependents** and/or a Social Security
- Number verification letter issued by the Social Security Administration
- Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) assignment letter for you, your spouse and dependents
- Proof of foreign status, if applying for an ITIN
- **Birth dates for you, your spouse and dependents on the tax return**
- Wage and earning statement(s) Form W-2, W-2G, 1099-R, from all employers
- Interest and dividend statements from banks (Forms 1099)
- A copy of last year's federal and state re turns *if available*
- Proof of bank account routing numbers and account numbers for Direct Deposit, such as a blank check
- **Total paid for daycare provider and the daycare provider's tax identifying number** (the provider's Social Security

Number or the provider's business Employer Identification Number)

- To file taxes electronically on a married-filing-joint tax return, both spouses must be present to sign the required forms.

Making your voice heard: Effective communication with your legislators,

by Dallas Hathaway

Have you ever been so mad about an issue, like being stuck on an Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) waiting list, but you didn't know what to do about it? Your legislators decide how much funding the HCBS waivers and all other government funded programs receive. They are the ones who control whether or not there are waiting lists.

If you are personally being impacted by their decisions, then your legislators need to hear from you. As a potential voter in their district your views can mean a lot.

The first thing you want to do is find out who your legislator is. The website for the Kansas Legislative Information Systems and Services (KLISS) has information on the legislators, the committees they serve on and any bills they are working on. You can use the "Find Your Legislator" link on the KLISS homepage (<http://kslegislature.org/li/>) to find out who your legislators are and how to contact them. If you do not have an Internet connection, you can always call the toll-free Kansas Legislative Hotline at: 1-800-432-3924. If you live out of state call: 785-296-2149.

You can communicate with you legislators by paying a personal visit, making a phone call or writing letters.

Here are some tips for writing letters.

- Make sure you spell his or her name correctly. Nobody likes to have their name misspelled and it certainly won't add to your credibility.
- When you finish the letter make sure you sign and address the letter neatly. This is particularly important if you expect a response to your letter.
- You want to be concise and to the point with your issue. Try to limit your letter to one page in length.
- Make your opinion on the issue clear. Discuss how it affects you personally.
- Do not talk about more than one issue per letter. If you have more than one issue of concern, write a separate letter for each of them.
- Support your opinions with facts and offer a solution to the issue if you have one. Legislators hear a lot of complaints, so they appreciate it when the person doing the complaining can offer them a solution.
- Don't send the same letter to more than one legislator. A personalized letter is always taken more seriously than a form letter.

If you make an appointment to visit with your legislator, you should never expect more than five to ten minutes of their time.

So, to help you prepare for an in-person meeting, here are some tips:

- Prepare a fact sheet to give to you legislator. This allows you to give additional information on the issue.
- Be polite to your legislator even if you disagree. You want to show that you are an effective communicator and if you treat your legislator with respect he or she is more likely to do likewise.
- Practice what you are going to say. Be clear on the topic, and only discuss one issue at a time.
- Be concise and stick to your talking points. Remember you only have a few minutes to make your case *and* respond to your legislator's questions.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know", if you don't have the answer to a question. Trying to make up an answer will only undermine your credibility. Let your legislator know you will find out the answer and it will give you another chance to speak with her or him once you do.

If you have a meeting with a group of people, here are some tips:

- Keep your group small and organized;
- Decide what talking points you want to cover;
- Decide who will talk about what, and;
- Just like with an individual meeting it is important to practice what you are going to say.

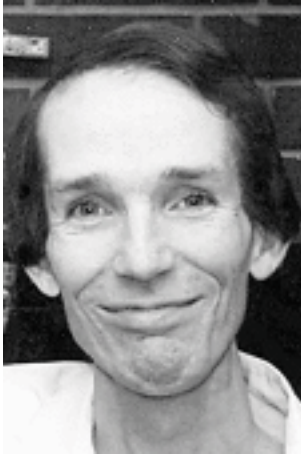
The most important thing is that you tell your Representative or Senator what you want.

I hope these tips have inspired you to become more involved in the legislative process. You can achieve a lot if you are willing to get involved in the democratic process and stay persistent with your issue.

Some of the content of this article is used by the kind permission of Dennis M. Byars, Seven Keys to Effective Legislative Advocacy and Michael Oxford



In Memoriam, TILRC Board member and advocate Steve Kramer



TILRC honors the memory of Steve Kramer, who died suddenly on Tuesday, December 21, 2010. He had just recently retired after 31 years of working for the State of Kansas, Budgets & Grants Departments and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Steve was associated with TILRC for over 17 years and served for many of those years as the Board Treasurer. He was also a Board member for the Topeka Metropolitan Transit Authority.

Fellow TILRC Board member Tessa Goupil remembered him as “a cornerstone at TILRC.” Goupil said, “It has been an honor to work with him. He made his decisions after careful rational thought, tempered with compassion and justice.”

An ardent community transportation advocate and frequent bus rider, Steve was well-liked by the TMTA bus drivers, who eulogized him saying, “There are few passengers that you really look forward to picking up. Steve was one of those. He was such a bright spot in our lives and we sincerely loved transporting him to his destinations.

We appreciate his brave leadership on the board and the commitment that he had toward transit in general.”

TILRC Board member Ken Lassman said, “I was privileged to work with Steve on the TILRC board.” Lassman reflected the thoughts of many who knew Steve when he said, “I feel like my life was greatly enriched by his intelligence, his sense of good humor, and his level headedness concerning too many issues to count. His circle of influence was as wide as his smile!”

Family Employment Awareness Training (FEAT)

The Beach Center at the University of Kansas, in collaboration with Families Together has developed a training program entitled Family Employment Awareness Training (FEAT) which consists of a 2-day training on the possibilities for employment for individuals with disabilities. The purpose of FEAT is to reach out to individuals with disabilities, their family members and service providers to increase awareness of employment options and the Kansas resources to support the employment of individuals with disabilities.

Trainings are scheduled for Lawrence, Overland Park, Pratt, Salina, Hays, and Wichita beginning in early March.

For more information call 1-800-264-6343 or go to: http://www.beachcenter.org/families/family_employment_awareness_training.aspx.

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- Health Support Specialist
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- GED and basic skills enhancement
- Customized training
- Registered Apprenticeship opportunities
- Financial assistance for training and education

Visit your local workforce center or call (877) 509-6757 for

more information on the Kansas Health Profession Opportunity Project

This document was supported by Grant #90FX0021/01 the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of HHS.

Kansas Lifeline Program: Save up to \$17.77 off your telephone bill



You may be eligible to receive up to \$17.77 off your monthly local telephone bill through the Lifeline Program. If you don't currently have telephone service, you may also be eligible for a discount on your connection charge through Link Up America.

You are eligible if you receive any of the following:

Food Stamps, General Assistance, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Temporary Assistance to Families, Medicaid, United

Tribes Food Distribution Program, Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribally Administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Head Start (only those meeting its income qualifying standard), Free School Lunch Program, 150% of the federal poverty level*. A consumer must provide THREE CONSECUTIVE MONTHS of statements as documentation of income, or provide a copy of their tax return for the previous year.

For more information about Kansas Lifeline or Link Up America, call your local telephone company. The number is on your telephone bill or in the front part of the telephone directory.

*2010 Kansas Poverty Level Guidelines (latest figures)

Number In Family	Maximum Annual Income
1	\$16,245
2	\$21,855
3	\$27,465
4	\$33,075
5	\$38,685
6	\$44,295
7	\$49,905
8	\$55,515

each additional person \$ 5,610

The Kansas Lifeline program is 150% of the 2010 federal poverty level.

Information prepared by the Kansas Corporation Commission, 1.800.662.0027



Uriel Tarin joins TILRC advocacy staff



TILRC's newest Independent Living Advocate is Uriel Tarin. Uriel recently graduated from Washburn University where he earned a Bachelor's Degree in English literature with a minor in Graphic Arts. He is also a graduate of Washburn's Paralegal Certificate Program.

While he was a student at Washburn, Uriel also worked as a volunteer in the Shawnee County District Attorney's Office. There he helped with various types of office work and research.

Prior to coming to work at TILRC, Uriel was an office assistant at The Farm (TFI), an adoption and foster care agency in Topeka.

Uriel has always had an interest in the legal field and thought that TILRC might give him the opportunity to use his legal skills to help people with disabilities. As an advocate Uriel enjoys educating consumers of their legal rights and assisting them in becoming better self-advocates. He likes the challenge of researching and identifying service options and working with his fellow advocates to come up with creative solutions to problems his consumers are facing.

In his leisure time Uriel enjoys reading satire. One of his favorite authors is Jonathan Swift, the eighteenth century Irish author best known for such works as *Gulliver's Travels* and *A Modest Proposal*.

Uriel gets plenty of exercise playing wheelchair basketball for the Kansas Wheelhawks. The Wheelhawks are currently ranked 17th in the nation by the National Wheelchair Basketball Association and compete in about one tournament a month during the winter season. Playing for the Wheelhawks was Uriel's first experience at playing team sports, but he

soon came to find that, besides the tournament competition, he really enjoys the weekly practices and the camaraderie with his teammates.

TILRC is happy to welcome Uriel to our independent living advocacy team.

TMTA service reductions and budget woes

On January 23, 2011; Topeka Metropolitan Transit Authority (TMTA) instituted a number of services changes to the fixed route bus service. These changes will not affect the LIFT paratransit or evening and Sunday demand response service.

Following the recommendations that were made in the DHR Comprehensive Operational Analysis, TMTA cut 14 trips from the fixed route system. Most of these trips are at the beginning or end of the fixed route service day.

In addition TMTA has made some significant route changes. Highlights of these changes include:

- The extension of the East 6th Orange #11 to Lake Shawnee (29th & Croco Road).
- The discontinuation of the Downtown Lunchtime Express due to low ridership. The Oakland Blue #1 and the North Topeka Blue #3 has been re-routed to serve riders to destinations like, Lets Help, the Mission, Great Overland Station and Hope Center. In addition, both routes have been expanded to serve Dillon's and Wal-Mart North as well as Woodland Apartments.
- TMTA also discontinued service to Valeo Recovery Center at 330 S.W. Oakley Avenue because there is not enough space to safely turn the bus around.
- The West 17th Red #6 is no longer serving HyVee. This is another case of not having enough space to safely turn the bus around.
- The West 29th Special Red #14S has been reduced to operate only once in the morning and once in the afternoon.

A brochure with the new route maps and schedules is available at Quincy Street Station.

TMTA has been conducting monthly "How to Ride" Clinics to familiarize riders with the service changes and to assist them with navigating the system. The date for the next clinic has not yet been announced, but it will likely be in late March or early April. This clinic will focus on the needs of "English as a second language" riders.

Staff at Quincy Street Station is also available to assist riders with the new route changes and to help plan trips.

Are there more service cuts yet to come?

TMTA CEO Janlyn Nesbett-Tucker hopes not. She says, "Our community needs stability in their transit system. I really wish we could offer *more* service at a time when the economy is so tight." Nesbett-Tucker recalls, "In 2008, when gas prices were climbing daily, we gained almost 200 new riders *per day* every time gas rose by 50 cents."

Unfortunately, since that time TMTA's shrinking budget has led to service reductions of over 30%. With current gas prices topping three dollars a gallon, TMTA expects demand to increase just like it did in 2008.

Sadly, the budget outlook is bleak.

The Federal Transit Administration has told TMTA to expect a reduction in their federal funding of over 40% beginning this year. Governor Brownback has recommended a \$200 million cut to the Kansas Department of Transportation budget, which the Legislature appears likely to approve. And recently, the Topeka City Council's policy and finance committee voted to recommend capping TMTA's property tax levy for 2012 at 4.2 mills.

The City Council set the cap at 4.4 mills last year, but actually gave TMTA only 4.2 mills in funding. Reducing the cap to 4.2 mills means that would be the maximum amount of funding TMTA could get in local funds in 2012, but it is no guarantee that it won't be less.

Local public transit advocates will need to remain vigilant and vocal to ensure that policymakers provide adequate funding to keep the buses rolling in Topeka.

With four council seats up for election on April 5th, advocates should seize the opportunity to engage in the democratic process and work to elect council members who understand the importance of public transportation in our community and are willing to fight for it.

SUPPORT ADAPT!

Grab your wheels, your bike, your dog, your kid or your skates. But most important sign up your sponsors, to support Disability Rights while you run with ADAPT. This is not a race. You will run, walk or roll around a 1/4 mile track for an hour and count your laps. We do the rest. We provide T-shirts, food, drinks and lots of music for sponsored participants! All proceeds go to support disability rights.

Date: **Sunday, May 1, 2011**

Time: **1:00–4:00 p.m.**

Location: **Upper Senate
Park,
Constitution and 1st St,
Washington, D.C.**

For more information or to register:

785-207-6508

ksiek@cox.net

www.adaptfunrun.org



Defending Our Freedom!

Kansas Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP)



What is LIEAP?

The Kansas Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) is a federally funded program, administered by the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) that helps eligible households pay for home energy costs. SRS is currently accepting applications through March 31, 2011.

Who Qualifies for LIEAP?

Households meeting the following requirements:

- 1) An adult living at the address must be the person responsible for paying for the heating bill. The bill may be owed to either the landlord or the fuel vendor. (You will need to submit a copy of your gas and/or electric bill, unless you are a Westar or Kansas Gas Service customer.)
- 2) The total gross income (before anything is taken out) of all persons living at the address cannot be more than 130% of the federal poverty level.

To find out if you qualify for LIEAP and how to apply call 866-44-LIEAP (866-445-4327), Monday through Friday 7 A.M. to 7 P.M. The TTY number for the hearing impaired is 888-688-1666

Would you like to submit a story idea, letter or editorial?

We The People welcomes your ideas for newsletter content, including suggestions for future articles and letters to the editor. The Editor reserves the right to edit or omit any material you may submit.

Do you have something to sell?

Do you have some disability-related items or equipment you don't need anymore, but is still in good condition? We can advertise it for you in *We The People*. Just call, write or e-mail Kevin with a description and a person to contact.

Kevin Siek, Topeka Independent Living Resource Center, Inc., 501 SW Jackson St., Suite 100, Topeka, KS 66603-3300, email: ksiek@tilrc.org, phone: 233-4572

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- I am not currently receiving *We the People*. Please sign me up.
- I don't use TILRC services but would like to subscribe for \$10 a year.
- I would like to make a donation.

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