

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information contact:
Jesse Bethke Gomez, MMA, MCIL Executive Director
651-603-2012 | jessebg@mcil-mn.org



Minnesota Governor Tim Walz Offers Certificate of Commendation for January 23, 2021 as “Ed Roberts Day”

Commendation honors disability rights activist and recognizes critical role of independent-living programs and practices

ST. PAUL, Jan. 23, 2021: Recognizing the lasting legacy of disability rights advocate Ed Roberts, and the vital role the Independent Living Philosophy—which he pioneered—plays in the lives of Minnesotans with disabilities, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz issued a Certificate of Commendation celebrating January 23, 2021, “Ed Roberts Day.” The Commendation is notable recognition of the critical mission Minnesota’s Centers for Independent Living share to ensure Minnesotans with disabilities and their families can achieve the same civil rights and control over choices in their own lives as people without disabilities.

“Ed Roberts made activism for disability rights his life’s work,” said Governor Tim Walz. “Few have done as much to advance the causes of expanding access for students with disabilities and creating communities that are barrier-free. He left an incredible legacy, and I’m pleased to offer this Certificate of Commendation honoring his contributions.”

Born on January 23, 1939, Ed Roberts contracted polio at age 14. Paralyzed from the neck down, he required an iron lung or respirator to breathe. After completing his high school education, he was the first student with significant disabilities to attend the University of California, Berkeley, where he founded the college’s Physically Disabled Students Program, which became the model for Berkeley’s Center for Independent Living. Today, there are more than 400 independent living centers across the country, including eight in Minnesota. Roberts was the first California State Director of Rehabilitation with a disability, was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship, and was co-founder and President of the World Institute on Disability. Roberts spent his lifetime overcoming countless obstacles and fighting to ensure all people with disabilities could fully participate in society. The United States House of Representatives declared January 23, 2011, “Ed Roberts Day,” which is now recognized at federal and state levels across the country, including Minnesota.

“Ed Roberts was a trailblazer who made it his life’s work to fight for the civil rights of people with disabilities,” said Minnesota House Speaker Melissa Hortman. “His incredible legacy and spirit serve as an inspiration in our work to eliminate barriers and improve the lives of Minnesotans with disabilities.”

“Ed Roberts was truly a pioneer in changing perspectives about the disability community,” said President of the Minnesota Senate Jeremy Miller. “He’s responsible for much of the progress that’s been made, and I’m glad to see the state of Minnesota recognize his work and his leadership with this honor.”

Under Minnesota Statute 268A.01, Minnesota’s Centers for Independent Living assist Minnesotans with disabilities and their families in accessing supports designed for the unique needs of every individual and ensuring equal access, inclusion, and independence. The Centers are guided by the State Plan for Independent Living from the Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council MN (Statute 268A.02). In Minnesota, close to 600,000 individuals report having a disability. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, nearly 220,000 people or approximately 4 percent of Minnesota’s population live with serious mental health conditions.

“We are honored Governor Walz offered the Certificate of Commendation for Ed Roberts Day, and thank House Speaker Hortman and Senate President Miller for their thoughtful remarks,” said Metropolitan Center for Independent Living Board Chair Jeff Bangsberg. “The Independent Living Philosophy is foundational to our work to ensure people with disabilities can live their most independent lives. Our commitment to Removing Barriers and Promoting Choices is rooted in Ed Roberts’ lifetime of advocacy and advancing opportunities for people with disabilities. In light of these difficult times and ongoing challenges facing members of the disability community, we are grateful to Governor Walz and our legislative leadership for shining a light on the enduring impact of Ed Roberts’ work and the critical role the Centers for Independent Living play in the lives of so many across our great state.”

Learn more about Ed Roberts’ life and legacy at <https://www.edrobertscampus.org/about/>

Learn more about Minnesota’s Centers for Independent Living at <https://www.macil.org>

###