

Jim Brown's Fight for Independence: A Life on the Line



Twenty years ago, Jim Brown sat on the board of LIFTT, helping to steer the mission of independence for people with disabilities across Eastern Montana. Today, he is at the heart of a battle no one should have to face — a fight for the very services that make independent living possible.

Jim, a tetraplegic and beloved schoolteacher, lives independently with the daily support of Personal Care Assistants (PCAs). These essential workers help him with bathing, dressing, toileting, mobility, meal preparation,

medication, and safety — the basics of survival and dignity. Without this care, his independence — and his life — are in danger.

Yet recently, a bureaucratic decision wrongly stripped Jim of his Medicaid eligibility, deeming him ineligible for the PCA services on which he depends. This was not a policy nuance or paperwork delay — it was a catastrophic error with life-threatening consequences.

What's worse, Jim was not given a fair chance to appeal. The formal hearing was not even scheduled, and he has been waiting for almost three months. A process meant to protect became a wall he could not scale. But here is what we know — and what Medicaid Montana must acknowledge:

Jim Brown remains eligible for services.

Our review of his eligibility, including his continued participation in the **Workers with Disabilities Medicaid Buy-In program**, clearly shows that he qualifies for support. Denying him care based on a flawed determination undermines both the letter and spirit of Medicaid's mission.

We Are Asking — No, We Are Urging

This is a call to action — not just on Jim's behalf, but for everyone who lives on the edge of institutionalization.

We are asking Medicaid Montana to do the right thing: reverse this unjust decision, restore Jim's services, and uphold the values that keep people with disabilities living safely in their homes, their communities, and their lives.

"How can someone in Jim's condition be deemed ineligible?"

"What metric, what policy, what rationale could possibly justify removing care from a person whose very existence hinges on these supports?"

This is not only a systems failure. It is a human rights issue.

Jim Brown has spent decades fighting for inclusion, access, and dignity. Today, we ask that those charged with serving him honor those same values.

Medicaid was built to protect the most vulnerable. We implore you to let it do just that and help him avoid institutionalization, continuing to be an icon of independent living.

For more information, please visit LIFTT's website at www.lifft.org.

LIFTT is a Montana 501(c)(3) nonprofit Center for Independent Living (CIL) with offices in Billings and Glendive, providing services to aging and disabled individuals in 18 counties across South and Central Eastern Montana: Big Horn, Carbon, Carter, Custer, Dawson, Fallon, Garfield, Golden Valley, McCone, Musselshell, Powder River, Prairie, Richland, Rosebud, Stillwater, Treasure, Wibaux, and Yellowstone.

Our Vision: Empowering aging and disabled individuals to LIFTT themselves above the barriers of life.

Our Mission: Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow – LIFTT's mission is to empower aging and disabled individuals to live independently through education, support, and opportunities.