



# *Disabilities Network of Eastern CT, Inc.*

238 W. Town St. Norwich CT 06360

**FEBRUARY 26, 2008**

**TESTIMONY CATHERINE FERRY RE: SB 413 (RAISED)' AN ACT ESTABLISHING A  
COMMUNITY PROVIDER RESCUE FUND ACCOUNT AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES  
COMMISSION'**

**AND RECOMMENDED INCREASE IN DSS/BRS FUNDING FOR FIVE EXISTING  
CENTERS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING**

My name is Catherine Ferry. I live in Portland, CT. I am the executive director of the Disabilities Network of Eastern Connecticut, located in Norwich, CT. DNEC is one of the five state and federally mandated and funded Independent Living Centers in the state. We have been in existence for twenty years. We are mandated to serve all of eastern CT.

DNEC's members, consumers, board of directors and staff strongly support Raised Senate Bill 413, and an increase in the DSS/BRS state appropriation to remedy the chronic underfunding and current cuts in the budget for the CILs.

The point has been made time and time again, that the nonprofit providers in CT provide essential community services at a cost significantly lower than similar state operated services. In the case of the 5 Centers for Independent Living, we are consumer run and consumer directed agencies. We espouse the Independent Living Movement philosophy of peer mentoring of persons with disabilities, by persons with disabilities. We help folks with disabilities make choices and set goals so that they can live independent and productive lives of their choosing. By mandate, at least 51% of our staff and board of directors must be individuals with disabilities. (DNEC far exceeds this mark.)

We work with individuals, and their families, who have all and any type of disability; physical, cognitive, genetic, acquired. We see the person first, not the disability.

In addition to peer support, information and referral, and independent living skills training, we engage in system advocacy and education to forward the goals and values codified in the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). We are currently the lead agency in eastern CT for the CT Nursing Home Pilot Transition Project, soon to be the expanded Money Follows the Person (MFTP) program.

We serve all of eastern CT, (from Putnam and Danielson, through Willimantic, Colchester, Norwich, New London, Groton, Waterford; 25 towns and cities, all disabilities, children, adults, seniors, families), from our small office in Norwich. DNEC's staff includes 4 fulltime workers and 3 parttime workers. In the last 2 years, we have eliminated 2 and 1/2 positions. We have an additional 1 and 1/2 positions open that we cannot fill due to lack of adequate funding. Our center, and each of the 4 others throughout the state, have lost \$33,000 in state funding in the last year. We have had to advocate to be included in this year's pnp 3% COLA. Our federal

EMAIL: [dnecc@snet.net](mailto:dnecc@snet.net) WEB PAGE: [WWW.disability-dnec.org](http://WWW.disability-dnec.org)

860-823-1898 (Voice) 860-889-3576 (TTY) 860-886-2316 (FAX)

funding is level this year, and will be reduced next year.

My staff earns between \$11 and \$15 per hour, with minimal benefits for fulltime staff. Most of the staff have been with DNEC for 6 to 8 years. This is the 4th year in a row that we have been unable to reward our overworked and under paid staff with any increase in salary. Rather, they receive increases in caseloads and responsibilities to cover the work of those who have left for greener pastures, or whose positions have been eliminated.

In order to just catch up with where we were 4 years ago, (discounting inflation, gas and health insurance costs), DNEC needs a \$100,000 funding increase. I am constantly writing private grant applications, while trying to supervise my stressed out staff, and participate in statewide advocacy.

Last year, we served more than 100 individuals and families from eastern CT, who have disabilities and who have requested assistance. In the last 9 months, we have assisted 10 individuals to transition from nursing homes to their own accessible, affordable housing, to hire supports and personal care assistants(as needed), to develop their own planed goals to pursue active lives in the community, including in some cases, work. We receive an average of 90-100 separate information and referral calls per week. Staff caseloads are as high as 20-40 individuals, while also running a website, providing ADA consultation to public entities, pursuing entitlements for individuals and helping individuals in need to procure technical assistance and adaptive devices. We attend school PPTs, run a Deaf Focus group monthly, provide outreach, prevocatrional and daily living skill help. We work with all, including individuals with brain injuries, PTSD, veterans, their families, persons with disabilities who are at risk for abuse, and exhausted caregivers. We participate at the local, state and national level in advocacy and public education efforts and disability planning.

Our nursing home transition program alone, not only drastically improves the quality of an individual's life experience; it saves CT at least \$80,000 per person, per year, net.

Centers for Independent Living are one of the best kept secrets of community resources for persons with disabilities and needs in the state. We save taxpayers' dollars, and help those who can, to work (a vast untapped resource of potential motivated employees), and to become taxpaying citizens.

The financial position of all 5 of the CILs is so precarious, that following the trend of the last 4 years, that soon, we will no longer be able to continue our 20 year history of personal empowerment, dignity and consumer driven programs and services. This reprehensible situation is occurring just when CT is assaulted by the pressures of an aging workforce, nursing home scandals, returning veterans with multiple needs and disabilities, and increased survival and resulting complexity of needs of children and adults with acquired disabilities.

Surely, CT is not that fiscally shortsighted, or that callous towards the needs of the thousands of its citizens and children who live daily with disabilities. So many have and can benefit from our experiences, examples and programs.

Therefore, we ask you to pass, and fund, Raised Senate Bill 413, and additionally, to increase the DSS/BRS appropriations to the 5 Centers for Independent Living by \$100,000 per center, ongoing. We're a great buy! Thank you.