



***Disabilities Network
of Eastern CT, Inc.*** 238 W. Town St. Norwich CT 06360

TESTIMONY BEFORE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE February 18, 2009

Good Afternoon Madam Chairman and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Catherine Ferry from Portland. I am the Executive Director of the Disabilities Network of Eastern CT, (DNEC), one of the five state and federally mandated Centers for Independent Living in CT. We serve all persons with disabilities in Eastern CT. We provide Information and Referral, Independent Living Skills Training, Peer Mentoring, Advocacy, and Assistive Technology help. We are one of the DSS Money Follows the Person contractors; (we help move folks from nursing homes to their own apartments in the community.)

We help persons with disabilities gain the information and skills they need to live full productive lives in the community, rather than being warehoused and forgotten in institutions. Nationally, and locally, the Independent Living Center Movement created the impetus and legislation that developed the Americans with Disabilities Act. We continue to be important policy makers.

The Governor's budget and DSS have proposed cutting the State funding to the 5 ILCs. This is penny-wise and pound foolish. I would like to tell you the "costs" of a typical DNEC consumer, and how we help save lives and money.

"Mary" has worked all of her life; she is a divorced mother who takes care of her kids, pays her bills, (including her mortgage), and gets her kids and herself medical care through her employer. Last year Mary was in a terrible auto accident. The other driver had no insurance. Mary became a paraplegic. Her physical therapy, sick/vacation time and disability insurance are all used up. Her kids take care of her the best they can.

Mary has applied for Social Security Disability, and has been denied. Because she owns her home (with a mortgage), a car (she can no longer drive), and has some small savings, she has been told she is not eligible for Title XIX. She has maxed out her credit cards, her mortgage is about to go into foreclosure, and her kids are showing the stress by acting out in school.

Testimony before Appropriations Committee

February 18, 2009

Page 2

On top of all of this, Mary had her kids try to push her wheelchair down the front steps so that she could get into the yard and get a ride from a friend to do some errands.

Mary fell. Neither the kids nor the friend could lift her back into her chair, or push her into the house. 911 sent an ambulance which took her to the hospital.

The hospital social worker, with Mary's permission, called us. The future does not look good - Mary will probably stay in the hospital, (maybe even the ED), at the cost of \$800 per day, until entitlements can be worked out and she can be moved to a long term nursing home. With no relatives close by, her kids will be placed in DCF foster care, (perhaps not even together). How much will their lives continue to fall apart? What will be the short term and long term social and financial costs to CT for the unplanned and undeserved disintegration of this family? Mary's care alone will be at least \$292,000 per year.

BUT, the DNEC peer advocate who answered the call has some suggestions. With the help of a pro bono, knowledgeable attorney, Mary's SSDI application can be fast tracked. The DNEC advocate can work with Mary and the hospital social worker to find a temporary placement for the kids with neighbors. The advocate will visit Mary at the hospital and help her to set goals towards restoring her life. They may include contacting her ex for help with child support. Talking to the bank can postpone foreclosure and buy her some time. Her local church members are anxious to help when they learn of her predicament. They arrange food and housekeeping help to cover the first month she is home from the hospital. DNEC contacts some its special angels and resources- a safe, accessible ramp is built to the front door, the bathroom is remodeled to be wheelchair accessible. Mary and the DNEC advocate meet with the school social worker to arrange extra support and counseling for the kids, who are now home with Mary. A DNEC advocate who specializes in entitlements and vocational advocacy has already hooked Mary up with DSS for

Testimony before Appropriations Committee

February 18, 2009

Page 3

TANF support and food stamps. The VNA home health aide service comes twice a week. The ADA paratransit bus takes Mary to BRS assessment and training. BRS will pay for a job readiness assessment and a handicapped accessible vehicle and training for Mary to get to her a new job. Mary and her kids are receiving healthcare thru HUSKY. As soon as her job is fulltime and includes benefits, she will be able to switch to her company's health insurance. Mary attends DNEC independent living skills training, and her kids come to the meetings and hang out with other kids whose parents are learning to negotiate the world from a new perspective.

Within a year, Mary has renegotiated her mortgage. It will take longer to pay it off, but the payments are manageable. She's making a decent salary with a different employer, using her prior bookkeeping skills and some on the job adaptation arranged with her employer by BRS and DNEC.

Mary used federal and state entitlements that DNEC helped her apply and qualify for; this was short term state and federal help. The costs to CT were much less than \$292,000 per year for nursing home care , plus DCF will care for her kids for years to come. Instead, within a year, Mary is back at work, caring for her kids, (who are now doing better in school). She's paying her mortgage, her bills and taxes! The family is active in the church, where everyone is pleased and proud to have been a part of her success. Mary just applied to become a member of the DNEC Board of Directors.

The cost? DNEC has 7 fulltime and 3 part-time staff. The State of CT, DSS grants us \$471,300 per year to provide CORE advocacy services for folks like Mary. We served 176 separate "cases" last year. We answered 700 Information and Referral calls. Just two cases like Mary, and you've saved big bucks in one year. Play it forward. Independent Living Centers, governed by persons with disabilities, run by persons with disabilities, help persons with disabilities live full lives in our community. And that is good, fair and cheaper for everyone!

Do we really want to cripple this efficient, grassroots, cost-effective model? DSS pays for nursing home beds, too. You do the math. Thank you.

