

Testimony of Eileen M. Healy
Independence Northwest; Center for Independent Living of Northwest CT, Inc.
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Appropriations Sub-Committee Public Hearing
Department of Social Services Budget

Preserve Jobs for people with disabilities; Protect our economy and our most vulnerable citizens

Good Evening, my name is Eileen Healy and I live in Woodbury. Governor Rell appointed me to represent CT's Independent Living Centers on the Statewide Independent Living Council, and I've been the Executive Director of an Independent Living Center, Independence Northwest, for over 20 years. I'm here tonight to implore you to continue fully funding CT's five Independent Living Centers.

CT's Independent Living Centers provide essential services and advocacy for people with all types of disabilities and of all ages. The staff of the ILCs is comprised of people with disabilities; that is a core tenet of both our state and federal mandate. We avoid unnecessary duplication of services by utilizing existing community programs, many of which are also facing elimination or severe reduction of state funding. CT's nonprofits rely on each other to meet the needs of CT's most vulnerable citizens. The state cannot continue to balance its budget by eliminating funding for the "safety net" of services provided through CT's nonprofits; we are already

In fiscal year 2009-10 the legislature ignored the Governor's proposed biennial budget and approved funding for Independent Living Centers' with a 38% reduction in state funds. As of November 2009, we were also hit with the 5% rescission. Centers have been forced to reduce services and programs, and lay off staff. State funding is used to support the Centers' infrastructure; it allows the Centers to provide cost effective programs such as Money Follows the Person, Ticket to Work, Connect-Ability, Aging and Disability Resource Centers and Nursing Home Diversion - ALL programs that either save the state money or create new taxpayers.

In Governor Rell's midterm budget, the Department of Social Services highlights Money Follows the Person (MFP) and Diversion Grants. Not only is transitioning elders and people with disabilities back to the community from nursing facilities the right thing to do, it also saves the state millions of dollars through the enhanced Medicaid match and in institutional care. The Diversion grant seeks to assist people to avoid unnecessary and expensive institutionalization; again, a significant savings to the state of Connecticut.

Both of these highlighted initiatives are implemented at the local level through state contracts with the Independent Living Centers and Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). The success of those initiatives is largely based on the ILC's and AAA's capacity to transition people to the community and to support people to remain in the community. Despite the state's spotlight on MFP and Diversion, the proposed budget seeks to save \$665,927 annually by "suspending" funds to the ILCs, and effectively undermines the Centers' ability to assist people with disabilities and to save the state millions of dollars the ILCs create through the above programs. The unintended result of budget cuts to ILCs will be increased Medicaid and Unemployment Compensation costs, even greater reliance on costly state funded services and fewer people maximizing their independence.

It appears that the logic behind suspending funding for Independent Living Centers is the fact that the Centers will be receiving American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds - ARRA funds that were legislated to stimulate new jobs and programs, not supplant lost state dollars. CT will receive a total of \$880K in ARRA funds, to be disbursed over two to five years. One year of state funding totals \$665,927, which is critical annual funding for FIVE Independent Living Centers (\$133,185.00 per ILC). The

Governor appointed State Independent Living Council has agreed that the ILCs' ARRA funds should be disbursed over 4 years. Suspending state funding is just another euphemism for eliminating funding.

During my life as a person with a disability, I have been a recipient of services and a provider of services. I firmly believe in the Independent Living tenets of self-direction, self-reliance, self-empowerment and having choices. I live "independent living" every day. I work, I have family, I'm active in my community, I pay taxes and I vote. The Department of Social Services' Agency Purpose, states "DSS provides a continuum of core services to families and individuals who need assistance in maintaining or achieving their full potential for self-direction, self-reliance and independent living in cooperation with other state agencies, municipalities, and community-based organizations..." How will DSS achieve their "purpose" when the state is cutting funding for the Independent Living Centers, along with funding for other community-services?

Please don't be "penny-wise and pound foolish." The consequences of eliminating state funding for Independent Living Centers will increase state expenses far beyond the cost savings, and ultimately, it hurts Connecticut's children, adults and elders with disabilities.

Thank You.

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