

TESTIMONY OF WILLIAM ACOSTA – APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

February 22, 2013

Good evening Madam Co-Chairs Harp and Walker, and members of the committee. My name is William Acosta and I am from Bridgeport. I would like to take just a moment to say “thank you” to you and the members of this committee for all of the hard work that you do day after day to do right by your constituents and the citizens of this state who represent so many varied interests and agenda.

I come before you today to address a couple of items—the Governor’s proposed budget that eliminates all state funding for Independent Living Centers, and the elimination of the Cost of Living Adjustment for the Aged, Blind and Disabled.

I am a case worker at Bridge House in Bridgeport, which is a nonprofit psychosocial rehabilitation day program. I also serve voluntarily on the Board of Directors of the Disability Resource Center of Fairfield County, which is one of the five Independent Living Centers in the state whose funding is proposed to be eliminated altogether.

My passion for this work comes from my own lived experience as the parent *and* child of people with disabilities—both physical and mental. There is an intense personal emotional pain that comes with witnessing loved ones in despair. Truth be told, none of us is completely free of being at least relatively close to someone with a disability. But for me and many others, that translates into a relentless energy to serve daily and make a difference in the life of someone who might not otherwise be able to help him or herself.

The elimination of the nearly \$530,000 in state funding for Independent Living Centers would result in an unthinkable reduction of programs and services—and jobs—for the disability community of this state. These Centers are the main source of empowerment and autonomy for some 1100 people annually across Connecticut. One or more of these Centers might be forced to close altogether with no state funding.

Next is the elimination of the Cost of Living Adjustment for the Aged, Blind and Disabled. Right now, people in those categories are allowed to keep the federal increases in their disability benefits. But under the proposed budget, the state keeps the increase awarded by the federal

government; the cost of living would increase because of inflation, the individual's financial status would actually decrease since their income would remain stagnant.

Thanks in large part to your individual work on behalf of programs that serve people with disabilities; great strides have been made in recent years—in housing, for example—that have enhanced the quality of how persons are able to lead better and—satisfying—lives.

Your vision and your compassion don't go unnoticed, but we respectfully request that these proposed cuts in funding to programs and services to people who might otherwise simply not be able to survive be restored. Thank you again.