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Public Hearing
Appropriations Committee, Room 2-C
Centers for Independent Living Budget Elimination
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Good evening, Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Melissa Marshall and I am a disability policy and law consultant, as well as an attorney. Decades ago, I was the Executive Director of the Disabilities Network of Eastern Connecticut.

As a Center Director, I spent a lot of time explaining what Centers for Independent Living do and do not do. First, Centers for Independent Living do not provide housing. No one lives there. At Centers, people with all types of disabilities; physical, intellectual, psychiatric, sensory, learning and other disabilities learn the skills they need to function as autonomous adults in the community. Centers provide people with disabilities a single point of entry into disability services, transition from nursing homes as well as skills development in securing transportation, housing, education and employment. In addition, they provide core services of peer counseling, independent living skills training, and information and referral. Centers are staffed largely by people with disabilities who provide the community of people with disabilities that they serve role models. Employed professional with disabilities are critical in the disability community where unemployment hovers around 66%.

I am here tonight to talk about the elimination of the line item for Centers for Independent Living in the Governor's proposed budget. It seems that elimination of the centers was based on two incorrect assumptions. The first is that the centers will survive without state funding because they are federally funded and the second is that they represent an expense for the state.

While the centers receive federal funds at the moment, they do not receive a sufficient amount to continue to provide the quality cost saving services that they do to people with disabilities now. Centers will no longer be able to subsidize the cost saving Money Follows the Person Program that moves people out or prevents them from living in costly nursing homes. The Centers' budgets were cut by the federal government last year. With sequestration looming there is no reason to assume that centers will receive any federal funding in the future. If they do receive any funding it is foreseeable that it will be cut.

The second assumption is that Centers for Independent Living cost the state revenue. The opposite is true. Centers save the state money by supporting people with disabilities in living independently, leaving nursing homes and other institutions and preparing them to become employed tax payers who are no longer dependent on government benefits.

I urge you to restore funding for Centers for Independent Living to the budget. Thank you for your time and consideration.