

TESTIMONY OF CANDACE LOW BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS SUB COMMITTEE
Department of Rehabilitative Services Budget (DORS)
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, FEBRUARY 22, 2013

Good evening, members of the committee. My name is Candace Low, Executive Director of Independence Unlimited, a Center for Independent Living located in Harford. I am here today to ask that you restore funding for Centers for Independent Living (CIL's) in the state budget for core services that include advocacy, peer counseling, skills training and information and referral services. The CIL's serve all disabilities and all ages as well as family members of people with disabilities. The state currently funds five CIL's for \$519,572 (\$103,914 per CIL). The CIL's were previously funded at \$665,927 (\$133,185 per CIL). The loss of state dollars will seriously compromise the ability of CT CIL's at a time when people with disabilities will need the help of the Centers most. The CIL's are a part of the safety net for people with disabilities.

The CIL's need state funding to leverage for other funding and provide infrastructure (rent, utilities, telephones, administrative support) as well as staff for core services that support state grants such as:

- Money Follows the Person (MFP)
- Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC)
- Partnerships with DORS to provide pre-vocational services
- Youth Transition Initiative

The above grants are designed to reduce state Medicaid costs and increase the independence of the citizens of Connecticut. None of the grants fully fund the activities required. The CIL's provide a vast array of services that helps people stay in the community and saves the state money. Last year alone, we saved the state over 11 million.

During the last five years, Independence Unlimited has:

- Tripled the number of people with disabilities served with long term services to over 2000 (last year the number of new consumers served increased 53%)(20% of those served have mental illness)
- Answered over 5000 information and referral calls (doubled from 5 years ago)
- Provided training and technical assistance to thousands of people including staff of state agencies, transportation workers, service providers, hospitals, etc.
- Transitioned over 300 people from institutions into community based settings and provided support so they can stay in the community saving the state millions of dollars (an increase of 68% from five years ago)

Independence Unlimited has helped remove barriers to obtaining housing, assistive technology, health care, transportation and many other services. We are one of the few agencies that provide training and technical assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act and other disability legislation.

The work done by Independence Unlimited and our sister centers demonstrates the abilities of people with disabilities to perform vital services of the state and federal governments. We are unique. We are people with disabilities helping people with disabilities. Who can better understand the issues of the populations we serve? State support of the Centers for Independent Living supports the independent living philosophy so people with disabilities can enjoy the same civil rights as others and live in the community. State support is investing in people; it is the right thing to do. Thank you for your time.