Testimony of Eileen M. Healy
February 22, 2013
Appropriations Public Hearing
Department of Rehabilitation Services Budget

Restore state funding ($528,680) for CT's Five Independent Living Centers

Good Evening, my name is Eileen Healy and I live in Woodbury. I am the Chairperson of the State Independent Living Council, a Governor appointed body that is charged with statewide planning for independent living services people with disabilities. I am also the Executive Director of Independence Northwest, an independent living center serving northwestern CT. The Governor's budget proposes elimination of all state funding for the independent living centers (Centers). I'm here this evening to implore you to **restore state funding for Connecticut's Centers.**

Across the state, Centers provide essential services, information and advocacy for more than 10,000 people with physical, intellectual and mental health disabilities, of all ages, and their families, annually, and they cover the entire state. The staff of the Centers is comprised of people with disabilities providing services to other people with disabilities. The Centers seek to empower people to live independently in the community, to go to work, and to end reliance on state and federal social service programs, and they are seeing more and more people with less and less dollars.

OPM's Secretary Barnes stated that funding for the Centers was cut because the Centers will receive federal funding. Centers have received federal funding since 1981. If state funds are cut, the Centers won't get an increase in federal funds. In fact, their federal funding is subject to the sequester. If the state believes that the Centers can survive on their federal funds, why does the DORS' budget option impact statement say "*... may result in the closing of one or more centers currently in operation.*" The Centers **cannot** operate on the federal funding alone. The combination of state and federal funding is used to support the Centers' infrastructure and core services. The Centers leverage those state and federal dollars to provide cost saving programs such as Money Follows the Person, Housing Opportunities for People Living with HIV/AIDS, Ticket to Work, Veterans Services, Employment Services, Youth Transition, Aging and Disability Resource Centers and nursing home diversion. Last year the Centers transitioned 164 people with disabilities and elders from nursing homes to community living under MFP, saving the state a reported **$4.4M** dollars in enhanced Medicaid match. The proposed budget seeks to save **$528,680 annually (that's only $105,736 per Center)** by eliminating funds to the Centers - undermining the Centers' ability to save the state millions of dollars. The consequences will increase state expenses far beyond the cost savings, and ultimately, it hurts Connecticut's children, adults and elders with disabilities. I urge you to fully restore state funding for CT's Centers.

The Centers are one of many nonprofits that make up the "safety net" for CT's most vulnerable citizens. They collaborate to maximize their resources to meet the needs of the people they serve. The state contracts services to nonprofits because they can provide the safety net more cost effectively than the state can. But please remember, CT's nonprofits are businesses; they employ staff to provide the services. If the state continues to cut funding to nonprofits, there won't be any safety net. Consumers will be left to rely on more costly state services, such as nursing home placement and emergency room care, and nonprofit staff will be without jobs and seeking the same services they once provided to others. How does this save the state any money? It just shifts the increased expense to another state department or line item. Nonprofits appreciate the bond funds, but it doesn't offset the cost of providing services. I urge you to reject the Governor's proposal which cuts nonprofits to pieces and harms people in our communities.

Finally, when the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) was created in 2012, state funds were not sufficiently allocated to support the administrative functions of the new department. The Governor's proposed budget includes additional funding for increased personnel costs for DORS. I urge you to provide the funding DORS needs to operate effectively. Without it, people with disabilities and nonprofits will again, be negatively impacted.

Thank you for your attention and time this evening,

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