

TESTIMONY OF CATHERINE FERRY

APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING

BUREAU OF REHABILITATIVE SERVICES PROPOSED BUDGET

FEBRUARY 27, 2013

Good Evening:

My name is Catherine Ferry, of Colchester, CT. I am the Executive Director of the Disabilities Network of Eastern CT (DNEC), in Norwich. Also, I am the Vice President of the CT Association of Centers for Independent Living (CACIL), and a member of the State Independent Living Council (SILC). I am person who lives with multiple disabilities.

The five Centers for Independent Living in CT are federally and state mandated, consumer controlled and run agencies, serving any and all persons with any disability. We provide essential services, information and referral, peer counseling, advocacy, independent living transition services, pre-vocational and vocational services, youth transition services, special education advocacy, housing referrals, assistive technology, and many other services in conjunction with, and in referral to other local agencies. We are cost effective. We utilize, not duplicate, the existing service network. We help folks with disabilities learn how to help themselves.

For example, my center DNEC serves all of eastern CT. We provide multiple specialized services to the large Deaf community in eastern CT, including a support and socialization group, ASL interpreter advocacy, video phone services, outreach. Additionally, we provide CAPTEL phones and other services to those who are hard of hearing, especially seniors. We teach an ASL class for providers in the community. We offer support to parents of children with special needs. We run local advocacy and support groups. We help towns and facilities to assess their ADA building and public meeting compliance. We help persons in need get ramps and other assistive technology so that they can remain in their homes. We move folks from nursing homes to their own homes in the community. Oftentimes, we help persons "who can't be helped" by traditional community or vocational services. Our one to one, "I've been there, I can help you figure it out" modality creates an environment and expectation of personal success.

Last year, DNEC helped more than 600 eastern CT citizens with disabilities. Of those, 208 individuals requested vocational help. Almost half achieved their vocational goals. Ninety received individual vocational assessment and assistance. Eight were placed in permanent, paying jobs. Currently, we are working with 13 BRS referrals, including some young adults. We are starting a Youth Transitional Skills Group in the Planfield school system. During the same period, DNEC transitioned 20 individuals from nursing homes into their community placement of choice, We arranged necessary wrap around services; 38 others received services to prevent their institutionalization.

We are funded through a mix of federal and state matching funds, as well as grants and private donations. Last year DNEC received a small CDBG assistive technology grant from Norwich to

help residents who are poor and who need to get ramps to remain in their homes. We hope to continue this program, as well as to expand to New London.

DNEC and the 4 other CILs need state funding to provide the ongoing infrastructure (rent utilities, computers, phones, administrative staff, insurance) to support our delivery of essential and cost saving State programs such as Money Follows the Person (MFP), Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRC), BRS/BESB prevocational assessment and coaching, Ticket to Work, and Tech Act rehabilitation technology.

All of these grants reduce State Medicaid costs. Our cost efficient and effective community based programs and services increase the independence, community participation, and oftentimes, taxpaying ability of CT citizens with disabilities. We work closely with our community partners. DNEC is co-located with Senior Resources our local Area Agency on Aging. In collaboration, we are the resource for disability issues and needs.

Centers for Independent Living have existed for more than 25 years under federal and state statutes and funding. Our future is always uncertain. We have been cut again and again. We pay pittance salaries. My staff have no pensions or retirement accounts. We don't get cost of living or longevity pay. DNEC cannot fill needed open advocate positions. Yet, we continue to serve an expanding and diverse population of persons with disabilities.

The Governor's Budget proposes eliminating all state funding to CILs, in total, \$528,000 per year. We have been cut to the bone. We have received significant cuts over the last 5 years, together with some back filling with short term special use federal funds. Now, sequestration threatens our CORE federal funds, which at the very best, remain stable and do not address increasing casing loads or costs. We have no alternatives.

CILs are the best deal around for the price. We don't need planning and start up time, money or training. We are imbedded in our local communities. We take care of our own. We move folks into the community and teach them how to participate in community life and to become taxpayers. In the process of improving their lives, we save the State lots of money.

Don't be pennywise and pound foolish -- \$528,000 is peanuts in your budget deliberations. It is an essential part of survival for us. Sustain what you have that works! Don't cut our necessary state funding, hoping that it will be replaced with federal promises. It won't. We need you. You, and the people we serve, need us.

Quickly, I want to note that there are people here with disabilities who have success stories to tell you. Many more and their families have emailed or sent letters to this committee and to their local legislators. Many others are here to show support. Some are wearing special Tshirts. Some folks' disabilities are visible, some are not. Despite "special needs accommodations"; time standing or sitting, mobility problems, problems with crowded and noisy spaces, interpreter needs, accessible transportation, and more; being here is tough for those with extra challenges. I would ask that those who are here to support restoring funding for Centers for Independent Living, make yourselves known -- Please stand, wave, sign, or use whatever form of identification and communication works for you. Yes! We are here to tell you: "We are CT citizens. We vote. We say, do NOT cut state funding for Centers for Independent Living!" Thank you.