

Good Evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Cathy Ferry, from Colchester, CT. I am the Executive Director of the Disabilities Network of Eastern CT, (DNEC), the Vice President of The CT Association of Centers for Independent Living (CACIL), and a person living with the challenges of various disabilities.

I speak before you to urge you to restore the full state funding of \$502,246 to the 5 Centers for Independent Living, (CILs), in the Department of Rehabilitation Services budget. (This is \$100,050 in state funds per year to each of the 5 CILs.)

Such a tiny amount, why does it even matter? Why do we have so many people here tonight in yellow T-shirts, and more sending emails and testimony about such a pittance? After all, you have the frustrating task of dealing with a budget of billions with numerous awful proposed cuts, and perhaps even more granted the spending cap issue.

Some here this evening will detail eloquently the numbers showing that the state receives back tenfold for every dollar that it spends funding CILs. Still others will explain that our very existence and programs are federally and state mandated under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and that we have been cut again, and again, and again, over the last 25 + years. Like other nonprofits, the demands for our services, the number of consumers we serve and the complexity of their needs have increased almost in direct inverse proportion to our funding reductions.

All of this is true and very important. I could add that my CIL, DNEC, serves 37 towns in rural eastern CT. In 2014 we provided multiple services and assistance to 137 individuals, most of whom had more than one identified disability. In addition we provided information and referral to 537 individuals. We are mandated to provide the BIG FIVE mandated service areas. But, the reality is that we provide, assist, or refer persons of any age with any disability to : advocacy/legal services, assistive technology, children's services, communication services, counseling and related services, family services, housing, home modification and shelter services, skills training and life skills training, information and referral services, mental restoration services, mobility training, peer counseling services, personal assistance services, physical restoration services, preventative services, prostheses, orthotics and other appliances, recreational services, rehabilitation technology services, therapeutic treatment, transportation services, youth/transition services, vocational services, `and any other services I might have missed. Lots of which is helping folks maneuver the DSS entitlement maze.(Imagine being Deaf, or blind, or cognitively or emotionally challenged and then try

understanding those famous DSS mailings, calling for help, and waiting on the phone for more than an hour to speak with a caseworker!)

We help folks to decide when, how, and where, they want to live their lives, in the most inclusive, least restrictive community and family grouping of their choice. Sometimes, they even have to learn that they have a right to choice, what a choice is, and how to make it! So many significant life areas to make choices; self advocacy, communication, mobility, community based living, perhaps including transition from a nursing home, or institution, or even your parents' home. Educational and vocational choices, self care, (how?) Do I need an personal care attendant? How do I hire, supervise and pay them? What benefits and resources do I have, am I entitled to, how do I manage my resources? What do I want to do in my community of choice? Work, friends, church, recreation, social activity? How do I find others like me, or those who will accept and see me, not my label? And how in the world can I get to where they are when transportation especially in eastern CT, let alone accessible transportation, is at best "spotty"?

To do all this challenging, indeed, lifechanging work, DNEC currently has a staff of 4.5 individuals. Most of us have significant disabilities, and/ or have family members with disabilities. The same is true of our volunteer board of directors. Our total budget, including federal funding, pass through federal funding, state funding, special contract programs, fees for service, and donations, totals less than \$500,000.

Now you can understand why \$100,050 is not a minimal amount to us.

But for one moment, don't think about the money. We had a phone call a week or so ago from a 56 year old woman who was previously unknown to us, not one of our consumers. She called because she lives in a low income apartment in an area that often loses electricity and sometimes floods in bad storms. A blizzard was coming. She has an aide who comes in for a few hours a day to help her, but what if the aide could not get there? You see, this woman has a genetic pelvic and hip condition that makes it impossible for her to close her wide spread legs. She weighs over 250lbs. She has COPD, and uses oxygen to help her to breathe. She spends her life in her recliner. Her special wheelchair is broken and she cannot afford to have it fixed. When she needs to go to the doctor, she must call an ambulance for transportation. She has no family or friends. (Again, leave aside for a moment the cost and entitlement possibilities.)

This was Friday morning. A blizzard was coming. She was afraid that she would freeze to death. She did not want to leave her home. She asked for a Blanket!! (The landlord had given her DNEC's number.)

We went out and bought her two of the softest, warmest blankets we could find, and slippers, and snacks, and food and energy drinks that she could reach, open and eat from her chair. We bought her a flashlight and a battery radio. We made sure that she had extra cylinders of oxygen for the weekend. We called to make sure that the town emergency services special needs list knew that she was theirs. All of this was completed and delivered to her at her apartment by 4PM Friday afternoon, before the storm.

On Monday, there was a message on our answering machine. She had called to thank us for taking care of her, for the beautiful and warm blankets, for the wonderful selection of snacks and food, for the safety items, and for making sure she would be safe. Her fears did not happen. The power didn't go out, and her aide was only a little late. She cried because we heard her and understood her and honored her requests and helped her. Two blankets and some food! A woman with an incredibly hard lot in life. Someone who was slipping through the cracks into danger, and who asked for so little. Perhaps, she cannot even envision the more positive and productive choices we can help her make.

DNEC saw her, honored her as the person she is, and then we helped her with what she felt she needed.

And she wept in thankfulness, and so did we.

Now think of that \$100,050 for DNEC, and the same for each of the other 4 CILs, and all of the folks sitting here in yellow tshirts, representing hundreds more, including ones like our lady, who we haven't even reached yet. I need your wise counsel. Tell me, if we lose that \$100,050 per year, where in my tiny budget and with my small hardworking staff, how to serve her, and the next person in need?

Thank you for listening.