

Testimony of Brenda Kelley
Appropriations Sub Committee
Department of Rehabilitative Services Budget (DORS)
February 27, 2015

Good Evening, Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Brenda Kelley, I live in Windsor, CT and I retired in 2012 from my position as the AARP CT State Director primarily because my husband had developed a progressive life threatening disease. As the AARP CT State Director I had served on the CT Long Term Care Advisory Council and the Money Follows the Person Steering Committee assisting in developing programs & supports to help older people and people with disabilities remain independent. What I learned from colleagues on these committees (many of whom also were people with disabilities) was invaluable as I worked to now support my husband, Tom. When I retired I was honored to accept an appointment to the Board of Directors of Independence Unlimited in Hartford (one of 5 Centers for Independent Living statewide) as a family caregiver representative, a position that I still hold.

I am here this evening to ask you to not eliminate or cut the State Grant for the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) in the Appropriations Committee's Budget that you are developing. It will hurt many vulnerable people and it will not save Connecticut anything. I was shocked and sad to learn that the Governor's Proposed Budget totally eliminates the state grants for CT's Centers for Independent Living, [\$103,914 for each of CT's 5 Centers for Independent Living (CILs) or a total of \$519,572].

As someone who loved and cared for a person with a disability, this is personal to me. Tom was lucky to have excellent health insurance and the financial resources to obtain most of the supports that he needed but his challenges were still overwhelming. So many people with disabilities are not that fortunate. **They depend on the safety net services that CT's Centers for Independent Living (CILs) provide for their lives and for their independence.**

As a Board member of Independence Unlimited (IU) I am very worried about how we will be able to sustain the programs we provide with such a significant cut to our budget which is only \$765,541 (federal, state and other income) per year supporting all that we do! Eliminating the state grant would reduce this budget nearly 14%. Independence Unlimited and the CILs depend upon the State Grant for administrative costs such as rent, utilities, administrative support, and as a match for other funding. The Centers for Independent Living (CILs) have not seen a funding increase for years. I was surprised when I joined the Independence Unlimited Board to also learn how low the salaries are at all levels for the excellent staff we employ, most of whom also are people with disabilities. And these staff also have not seen a salary increase in years. **I might add that the most valuable support that Tom and I received came from other people living with a disability or supporting a person with a disability.**

The need for the supports Independence Unlimited and the CILs provide is so great! Now rather than working to address this need, we likely will have to reduce the number of people supported.

As a taxpayer, this also does not make sense to me. By helping people transition out of nursing facilities and also preventing others from having to be institutionalized, Connecticut's Centers for Independent Livings saved the State of CT about 5 1/2 million dollars in 2014. This was 10 times the funding they received from the State! I understand that we have significant state budget challenges this year and that legislators, especially The Appropriations Committee, have many difficult decisions ahead. But reducing or eliminating services that actually save the State more than they cost will not help the financial health of CT.

So in closing, I ask that you not eliminate or reduce the State Grant for the Centers for Independent Living (CILs). They provide unique and critical supports to very vulnerable people and save Connecticut millions of dollars each year.

I greatly appreciate the difficult job that you do and the challenging decisions that you face. I am willing to answer any questions that you might have. Thank you.

Brenda Kelley
29 Hudson Lane
Windsor, CT 06095
b.kelley@snet.net