

TESTIMONY OF SHELBY POWELL BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
Department of Rehabilitative Services Budget (DORS)
Legislative Office Building, February 27, 2015

Good evening. I'd like to thank the Appropriations Committee for the chance to speak to you tonight. My name is Shelby Powell and I'm here to speak on behalf of the independent living center for the Greater Hartford Area, Independence Unlimited.

I am against the proposed budget cuts to the centers and believe that the centers are one of the most valuable resources we have in the community. It's also very personal for me because I am an individual with Autism and Mental Health Disorders, and I have been a consumer at Independence Unlimited for two years.

I'm learning be independent and living on my own outside of my parents' home with the help of my advocates. I know that to live independently I will have to get a job. Applying for jobs was hard for me at first because I didn't know how to build a resume, create cover letters, or practice interview skills. Now I'm much more confident applying for jobs and going to interviews. In fact, I have been on 8 or 9 interviews and I've done very well with them.

I have accomplished a lot since I first started going to Independence Unlimited. I have been learning independent living skills that include: learning to grocery shop; doing laundry; shopping for clothes; and handling social interactions.

I have also been learning a lot about my own disabilities and how to deal with them and accept them. Autism Education has been and still is a very important thing to me. Before I started going to Independence Unlimited, I didn't know anything about Autism or why I do certain things like stimming or why I felt things with my senses in a different way than other people and why I think differently than other people. With the help of my advocates, I now know that I'm not alone. I have other people around me that understand my disabilities and can educate me more about my disabilities... and there are people out there that are just like me.

I have accomplished many of my goals already, but I have many more to look forward to and I need the help of my advocates at Independence Unlimited to reach them.

Independence Unlimited provides services like this and many more to people who have all kinds of disabilities whether it's physical or mental, they provide awesome services like job skills; peer counseling; individual advocacy; transition services; and one of the most important things Independence Unlimited is teaching me is how to self-advocate.

I would like to thank you for listening. Please reconsider cutting the budget because people with disabilities need these services to survive in the real world.