

TESTIMONY OF JADE VAIL BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS SUB COMMITTEE
Department of Rehabilitative Services Budget (DORS)
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, FEBRUARY 27, 2015

Good evening, members of the committee. My name is Jade Vail; I am from Manchester Connecticut. I am a person with a physical disability and I am an advocate at Independence Unlimited, Inc. Independence Unlimited is a non-residential, non-profit independent living center that serves a diverse population of people with disabilities in Hartford county. I am asking that you restore funding for Independent Living Center (ILC's) in the state budget for core services that include advocacy, peer counseling, skills training and information and referral services. The ILC's serve all disabilities and all ages as well as family members of people with disabilities. The loss of state dollars will have a dangerously negative impact on the ability of CT ILC's to provide vital services to residents of Connecticut, at a time when an even greater number of citizens, especially people with disabilities, need the help of our State's social service programs. The ILC's are a vital component of the safety net for people with disabilities.

At the heart of everything that Independence Unlimited does is the belief that the individual with the disability is in the best position to know what his or her needs are. It is in this spirit that we work tirelessly to respond to the needs of our community. Advocates at Independence Unlimited meet with consumers on a daily basis to provide skills training and resources to those who want to transition from nursing homes to community based living situations or, who want to prevent premature entry into an institution by strengthening the skills they need to live more independently in their communities. Independence Unlimited is a one-stop information resource center where people with disabilities can gain both important information about what their rights are, as well as more practical skills such as budgeting, disaster preparedness skills, and how to manage Personal Care Assistants. If funding to Independence Unlimited and the other ILC's is eliminated, Connecticut's residents with disabilities will lose out on the opportunity to have vital independent living skills reinforced and, miss out on opportunities to build social connections and strengthen ties to our communities. Also, by our emphasis on working with youth between the ages of 12 to 21, we are helping to build a strong legacy for future generations.

The work done by Independence Unlimited and our sister centers demonstrates the abilities of people with disabilities to be productive members of society at both the state and federal level. The services provided by the ILC's have a both a global and a personal impact on people with disabilities in our State. I know this, not only because of the positive effect I see our work have on consumers on a daily basis but, also from first-hand experience. Because, before I became an advocate, I was a consumer of IU. In 2008, I was homeless, jobless, and feeling powerless to make a constructive impact in my own life, much less in my community. It was because of the independent living skills training, peer counseling and, advocacy that I received from the IU staff, that have been able to blossom into a confident, contributing member of society; someone who lives independently in her own home, pays taxes, and has a job providing others the same life-changing services that were provided to me, seven years ago.

I am asking you to please restore funding to the Independent Living Centers in the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 budget. Please do your part to help us continue to help people with disabilities in Connecticut. People like me, who want nothing more than to be productive, contributing members of our State. Thank you very much for your time.