

Testimony of Kasey Gustafson
Appropriations Sub-Committee Public Hearing
February 11, 2016

Restore Funding to CT's Independent Living Centers

My name is Kasey Gustafson. I am here to testify on behalf of the Connecticut Independent living centers, in opposition of the proposed budget that will cut all state funding for the five Independent Living Centers here in Connecticut. Independent Living Centers offer essential services to children, adults, and elders with all types of disabilities.

I have been working at Independence Northwest, which is one of the five independent living centers, for 3 and half years as an Independent Living Advocate providing services to the deaf community. I was very fortunate to be hired at Independence Northwest. When I began working for Independence Northwest, I began the Deaf services program, which has grown from two consumers to over 40. It is the only program of its in kind in the western portion of the state. As an Independent Living Advocate, I am given an opportunity to help and pass on the knowledge that I have acquired, to individuals who are in the same position as I was once in. Individuals who don't know where to turn for assistance with housing, benefits, employment, who need peer counseling, and in many cases need an advocate. For Deaf/HOH individuals, they find that Independent Living centers are very useful because they receive assistance and have staff who are fluent in American Sign Language. They learn many things and become self-sufficient and independent when they receive the services. The services offered by Independent Living Centers are crucial for the well being of those individuals living with a disability. I go out and spread the word to the deaf community to let them know that there are many varieties of assistance that they can receive through Independent Living Centers.

In 2015 alone, as part of the Money Follows the Person Program centers have transitioned 233 individuals out of nursing homes and back to the community saving the state over 10 million dollars.

If the budget is cut and there are no services from Independent Living centers then where can the individuals with disabilities go to receive the services/assistance they need. Please reconsider about cutting Connecticut's Centers for Independent Living.

Thank you.

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