

Testimony of Eric Kalender
Appropriations Sub-Committee Public Hearing
February 11, 2016

Restore Funding to CT's Independent Living Centers

My name is Eric Kalender and I live in Waterbury, CT. I am writing to urge the committee to restore full state funding for Connecticut's Independent Living Centers. These centers provide a valuable resource to our state residents with disabilities to be able to live in our communities independently.

I relocated from NJ in 2012 to CT to mitigate the circumstances surrounding my disabilities which are bipolar disorder and polysubstance abuse. After becoming stable in my mental health treatment and my sobriety I decided in tandem with my therapists that I should probably look for a change of career as well. Before relocating from NJ, I was the Director of Retail Banking for a community bank and we concurred that securing a similar position at this juncture would probably be too much pressure for me in early recovery going forward.

Through the assistance of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) a CT state agency governed by the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) I was so very fortunate to be given the opportunity to be afforded an on the job training (OJT) at an Independence Northwest, one of the state's 5 Centers for Independent Living (CILS). In essence, Independence Northwest gave me an opportunity to change my career with a full knowledge of my disabilities and learn a new field while also giving me the support to keep moving forward and get back on my feet again with gainful employment and the satisfaction of going to work every day and making a difference in the lives of the consumers served by this agency. I am very proud to say that as of January, 2015 my OJT ended and I was hired as a full time Independent Living Advocate by Independence Northwest.

In 2015 CT's Center for Independent Living provided over 17,000 contacts with disability related information and referral services, 2533 people with disabilities with independent living skills training, peer counseling, advocacy, youth & education services, among other vital support services, 128 people with disabilities with services to obtain & maintain employment, 558 people with disabilities with services to obtain & maintain employment, 558 people with disabilities with services to obtain & maintain affordable & accessible housing, 284 people with disabilities with services to obtain transportation, and 422 people with disabilities received services that prevented institutionalization.

Although I have been fortunate enough to help quite a few consumers during my short time at Independence Northwest, I wanted to take a moment to bring to your attention a consumer that I helped in Ridgefield, CT. My consumer, "Betty" lives in

an apartment managed by City of Ridgefield housing authority and was trying for over a year without an avail to mitigate a dust mite issue in her apartment. Betty is highly allergic to dust mites and also suffers from sleep apnea. Unfortunately, the machine used at night for her sleep apnea required her to wear a mask that kept falling off due to her allergic reaction to the dust mites in her apartment resulting in a severe loss of sleep. Despite providing documentation from her doctor to the City of Ridgefield housing authority, nothing was being done to help Betty's situation. Upon contacting Independence Northwest, I was able to advocate for Betty with the Ridgefield Housing Authority and within several weeks of my initial contact have all carpeting removed from Betty's apartment and replace it with a vinyl floor. The dust mite situation was entirely eliminated and Betty is now able to get a full night sleep.

This is just one example of the many consumers that we are able to help live an independent and productive life in the community.

All of the services offered by the 5 Connecticut Independent Living Centers will be impacted tremendously if funding is eliminated so I urge you seriously reconsider this proposed budget cut so that we can continue serving the disabled and elderly communities.

Thank you for your attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,

Eric Kalender
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