

**Testimony of Brenda Kelley
Governor's Proposed 2016/2017 Budget for
The Centers for Independent Living (CILs)
Appropriations Hearing, 2/11/2016**

My name is Brenda Kelley and I live in Windsor, CT. I am submitting testimony to once again ask you to ensure that The State Grants for Connecticut's Independent Living Centers (CILs) (\$497,290) are restored in their entirety in the Appropriations Committee Budget for 2016/2017 and in the final budget adopted by the General Assembly. This includes the State Grant for Independence Unlimited serving Greater Hartford.

I was sad to learn that once again the Governor's proposed budget totally eliminated the state funded grants to the 5 Independent Living Centers who support persons with disabilities living in the community (as an alternative to institutionalization) as well as assist persons with disabilities in transitioning from institutions into community-based settings. **This represents a loss of \$497,290 for CT's 5 Independent Living Centers.** It jeopardizes the viability of Independent Living Centers supporting some of the most vulnerable people in Connecticut. And it will not save Connecticut anything!

I retired in 2012 from my position as the AARP CT State Director primarily because my husband had developed a progressive life threatening disease (sadly Tom died in 2013). 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. When I retired I was honored to accept an appointment to the Board of Directors of Independence Unlimited in Hartford as a family caregiver representative a position I held until recently.

When I was a Board member of Independence Unlimited (IU) I saw first hand the difficult job our staff did with very limited resources. I am worried about how they will be able to sustain the programs they provide with such a significant cut to their budget. 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. Connecticut's Independent Living Centers (CILs) have not seen a funding increase for years (actually, their State grant has been reduced slightly). 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 employed by Independence Unlimited, most of whom also are people with disabilities. And these staff also have not seen a salary increase in

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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.

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 Independent Living Centers (CILs) provide for their lives and for their independence. I also have seen how their work benefits all residents of Connecticut, regardless of their financial need. For example, Independence Unlimited is working successfully with the Church that I attend (Asylum Hill Congregational Church) & other churches to help them make their buildings and programs more accessible and welcoming to people with disabilities.

The need for the supports Independence Unlimited and the other Independent Living Centers provide is so great! Now rather than working to address this need, it may be necessary to reduce the number of people supported if the CILs State Grant is reduced or eliminated. As a taxpayer, this 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 Independent Living Centers (CILs) saved Connecticut over \$10.3 million dollars in 2015. This was almost 20 times the funding they received from the State! In addition, CILs prevented 422 individuals from entering nursing facilities saving a minimum of \$1 million.** I understand that we have significant state budget challenges this year and that legislators 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 Connecticut.**

So in closing, I ask that you ensure that The State Grants for Connecticut's Independent Living Centers (a total of only \$497,290) be restored in their entirety in the Appropriations Committee Budget and in the final budget adopted by the General Assembly. They provide unique and critical supports to very vulnerable people, help them work and live independently, and help make our communities more welcoming and supportive to people with disabilities (which impacts all of us directly at some point in our life). Plus they save Connecticut millions of dollars each year!

Thank you!