



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY FOR
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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Independent Living Centers Funding

Testimony of the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities

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Executive Director
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I am writing to express concern over the defunding of the five private, nonprofit independent living centers in the Governor's midterm budget adjustments proposal. Independent living centers are non-residential organizations that assist people with disabilities in reaching maximum independence.

The independent living movement was started in the late 1960s by Ed Roberts, a student with a severe disability at the University of California, Berkeley, whose ability to participate in academic and other university functions was seriously impeded by lack of access. The founding, in Berkeley, of the first Independent Living Center was a response to the momentum he initiated. Since that time, the Centers, which are required in every state by the federal government, provide advocacy for and information to people with a wide range of disabilities, including physical, cognitive, intellectual and psychiatric. They not only serve people with disabilities, but employ people with disabilities, who go on to mentor others on the journey to autonomy.

One crucial and creative function of the centers is the implementation of the Money Follows the Person Program, which provides the foundational support for moving people out of nursing homes and into independent housing. This service both vastly improves the lives of participants and saves the State money through deinstitutionalization (up to almost \$5,000,000 in one analysis); it also enriches communities by returning the sequestered talents and abilities of individuals to the wider setting of the world.

Independent Living Centers exemplify the "Power, not Pity" perspective that motivates the disability rights movement. They eschew victimhood in favor of potential. They recognize employment as an essential component of personhood. The advocacy they provide – in housing, transportation, healthcare, rehabilitation, etc. – is calibrated to strengthen self-reliance and diminish dependence. Among people who have been served and encouraged by Centers is a person who has attained regional stature as a healthcare expert; many individuals who contributed to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act; founders of healthcare cooperatives; and innumerable students who, with the advocacy they needed, went on to graduate from college and establish careers. And they are not the exceptions; they are the rule.

Terminating this funding would unjustly penalize countless people seeking independence and self-sufficiency. Please consider restoring it.