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Wednesday, February 10, 2016

My name is Mary Silverberg. I am a long time resident of West Hartford. By profession I am a speech/language pathologist and I am legally blind. I am on the State Board of the National Federation of the Blind. I am also on the Governor's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities. Speaking from personal and professional experience, I am opposed to the Governor's proposed budget cuts to the Office of Protection & Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities and CRIS Radio.

Protection & Advocacy works to maintain and advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. This needs to be an ongoing process to remain effective. P & A supports one of our most vulnerable populations in our time of need. They help us to navigate an extremely complex system and they act on behalf of so many citizens who feel they have no voice. P & A insures that our civil rights are being met under the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act. At any point in time, almost every person with a disability or a family member needs the resources of this agency. P & A is our ombudsman whether it be public accommodations, accessibility, voting rights, education, housing, employment or healthcare issues. They are a life link to the Disabilities Community.

CRIS Radio is SO MUCH MORE than "listening to the news". It allows the blind and those with physical disabilities who are print disabled to access information and to engage with accessible media. This includes children and adults. CRIS is providing programming online with a variety of childrens' magesines and resources through podcasts, downloads and smartphones. A few examples include: CRIS has established a Kids Library in schools which benefits children who are blind and others who are learning disabled. There is a CRIS access program that uses smartphones for scanning QR codes to get audio access and tactile information at Museums. CRIS is working with cable companies to make programming accessible to patients in hospitals. CRIS provides emergency preparedness information and is a life line to a vulnerable population who benefits greatly from their service.

I respectfully urge you to NOT cut funding for these two valuable agencies.

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