

Testimony Submitted to the Appropriations Committee
Submitted By: Alexia Boukoms,
Member of the CT State Independent Living Council
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Appropriations Committee

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Alexia Boukoms. I'm a Farmington resident and a member of the CT State Independent Living Council.

I'm here today to oppose the Governor's proposed elimination of \$497,290 for the five (5) Centers for Independent Living (CILs). Independent Living is the realization that freedom to make choices and the ability to live in the community is a basic civil right that should be extended to all people, regardless of disability.

To this end, Centers for Independent Living staff (many of whom are people with disabilities themselves) work with and for the consumer to promote independence. All CILs provide peer counseling, information and referral, independent living skills and advocacy. CILs may provide services to include: pre-vocational and employment services, youth transition, assistive technology, access to housing, to name a few.

In addition, CILs facilitate transition persons with disabilities from nursing facilities to community living and secondly, and perhaps more importantly, CILs prevent entry into nursing facilities in the first place. In this instance, one must not only consider the financial savings of avoiding institutionalization, but also the personal and psychological costs that affect individuals, their families, and their community of friends that result because of institutionalization.

In 2015, CILs transitioned 233 people with disabilities from nursing facilities to community living at an estimated savings of \$10.3 million. In addition, the CILs prevented 422 individuals from entering nursing facilities. That alone represents approximately a 10 fold savings over cost. Perhaps greater savings to the state have occurred, which may be more difficult to quantify, through prevention of persons from entering nursing facilities in the first place. One must consider the cost of admission to a facility, regardless of the length of stay. Any admission to a health care facility incurs medical examination costs, housekeeping costs, transportation cost, and other more difficult to quantify costs. Although these facilities provide essential care which I do not mean to trivialize, when individuals are admitted whose medical condition does not absolutely require such care, the direct and indirect costs to the person and their community must not be ignored.

In order for persons with disabilities to thrive living independently, in addition to having a place to live in the community, they need transportation, appropriate housing, employment, and often education. CILs provide this needed assistance and support. Therefore, funding for CILs needs to continue so that Independent Living, the freedom to make choices and the ability to live in the community, is a basic civil right for ALL.

Thank you.