

My name is Sharon Heddle and I am a registered voter from Groton, CT. I am an advocate working at Disabilities Network of Eastern CT (DNEC), one of the five Centers for Independent Living.

I understand the current fiscal crisis we are facing. I know these decisions of where to cut or what to cut are not easy decisions to make. However, I am asking you to please restore the funding for the Centers for Independent Living.

The Centers for Independent Living are not for profit agencies run for and by persons with disabilities. We offer services that empower people with disabilities to be as independent as they can be in their community.

An example of one person I work with is the 50 year old woman who has MS. The MS has affected her outlook on life and she is depressed and angry. She has no family, friends, or support system. She used to have friends, back when she was working, now time has gone on and so have they. She is no longer able to prepare a meal, bathe, or dress herself as well as things like shopping, laundry and cleaning. We helped her get onto the Community First Choice program which provided aides for her. Without this help there is no way she could have remained in her home and taken care of herself. She had already begun to discuss a nursing home or assisted living situation with her doctor when he suggested she call us.

A man I recently helped has one leg amputated. The stairs going into his home are wooden and they were rotted with a giant hole in one board and general rot on the others. Going up these stairs was very dangerous with or without his prosthetic. I found a contractor that was willing to replace the stairs at a huge discount and then found funding to pay for it. He can now get in and out safely. Who would have helped this man if we were not there?

We have applied for grants from other non-profit agencies, HUD Grants, and home revitalization grants to help pay for ramps, stair lifts, lift chairs, door widening, and modifying a bathroom to make it accessible. Without our help these consumers would have not been able to have these needs met.

There is a very large deaf community that we help. We get phone calls each month from places like doctors, dentists, churches, looking for assistance for their clients and visitors. We have a public video phone for anyone who is deaf to use. Where is a deaf person going to go to make a phone call if they do not have their own video phone?

We get referrals from 211, churches, shelters, doctors, social workers, DSS, Reliance House, TVCCA, The MS Society, City and Town Human Service Departments, and a very long list of other social service agencies.

We do so much for this community. I am asking you to put the Centers for Independent Living back in the budget.