

Testimony of Eileen M. Healy
February 11, 2016
Appropriations Public Hearing Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)

Do Not Eliminate Funding for CT's Independent Living Centers

Good Evening, my name is Eileen Healy and I live in Woodbury. I am testifying tonight to implore you to reject Governor Malloy's elimination of funding for Independent Living Centers (CILs), restore the full funding of \$528,680.00 and abandon the Governor's suggestion that commissioners "manage their own budgets."

As the chair of the CT Association of Centers for Independent Living (CACIL), I'm submitting testimony to represent the needs of CT's CILs. The CILs provide essential services for people with all types of disabilities and of all ages. All of our services are individualized to the needs of the person and their goals. CILs are consumer controlled, from the people we serve to the staff and board of Directors. People with disabilities control their own services and control the management and direction of the CIL. Although each CIL provides the same core services, including peer mentoring/counseling, information & referral, skills training and advocacy, and youth & nursing facility transition, all CILs are responsive to the needs of their communities. Some offer vocational services, services for the deaf, assistive technology, aging in place, and services to veterans and people living with HIV and AIDS. In addition, CILs work to ensure that communities are accessible to people with disabilities, both physically and attitudinally. People can obtain all the skills they need and want, but those skills won't be put into use unless they can access transportation, housing, education, employment, as well as many other activities. State Independent Living dollars ensure that our services are free, reducing yet another barrier to obtaining Independent Living. We also seek to avoid unnecessary duplication of services by utilizing existing community programs, many of which are also facing elimination or severe reduction of state funding, which will only further weaken the state's safety net for our most vulnerable citizens.

We know that the state budget is a huge problem financially and hard choices must be made. The Independent Living budget line has been \$528,680 for many years without any increases; that's the total funding for five (5) CILs. Those funds are required for CILs to provide cost effective programs such as Money Follows the Person (MFP), Ticket to Work, Aging and Disability Resource Centers, and Nursing Facility Diversion – ALL programs that save the state money. According to DSS, the average cost of nursing facility placement is \$146,000 per person, per year. Not only is transitioning elders and people with disabilities back to community living from nursing facilities the right thing to do, it also saves the state millions of dollars through the enhanced Medicaid match and in institutional care. In 2015, CILs transitioned 233 people from nursing facilities to community living and many more were prevented from ever entering a nursing facility. The savings to the state? An average of \$10.3M annually in MFP alone. The state spends \$528,680 to support CILs (even less when we consider rescissions and budget reductions from previous years) and we return \$10.3M. That's an amazing return on investment, but those savings aren't utilized to support the CILs. Perhaps they should be. The unintended result of eliminating funding for CILs will be increased Medicaid and Unemployment costs, even greater reliance on costly state funded services and fewer people maximizing their independence.

We understand that DORS has only a few state funded programs that they can cut, before cutting their own staff and operating costs, and because of that the CILs are targeted for elimination or reduction for many years now. DORS hasn't proposed any increases for the CILs. There's no acknowledgement that the CILs utilize those state IL dollars to subsidize the cost of other state contracts in other departments, including MFP. And if **unelected** commissioners are to "manage" their budgets, history has shown that DORS will have no other choice but to continue to target cuts to the CILs with no recourse from the community. Thanks to the members of the Appropriations Committee and many other legislators, funding for CILs has been consistently restored and without your support the CILs would have been defunded several years ago.

Eliminating funding for the CILs is bad for the state budget in the long run and its very bad for people with disabilities and their families in Connecticut.

Thank you for your continued support of the Centers for Independent Living.

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