

Testimony of Cecilia Lewis

Appropriations Committee

February 11, 2016

Department of Rehabilitation Services

My name is Cecilia Lewis and I have been employed as a Housing Coordinator at Independence Northwest, Inc since April 2013, under the Money Follows the Person Demonstration Program, contracted by the Dept of Social Services. Today, I am writing to urge you not to eliminate funding for Connecticut's Independent Living Centers.

As housing coordinator, I work with a team of transition coordinators and specialized care managers who are assigned to individuals currently residing in skilled and acute nursing facilities, who desire to return to the community. Our centers serve as a point of entry to the Money Follows the Person Program for consumers who are largely elderly or disabled. For many, institutionalization has resulted in the loss of their apartments partly because they were institutionalized much longer than anticipated. My job is to find affordable and accessible housing in the community, advocating with local landlords/property managers to obtain appropriate housing for them. Many of the people I work with are eligible for a subsidy through the Rental Assistance Program and through local housing authorities. Without this assistance, many of the people we have helped through this program would have continued to be institutionalized or ended up with housing that did not meet their needs, as far as accessibility is concerned or housing that was not affordable. The centers' partnership with The Money Follows the Person Demonstration Program saw 233 people transition from nursing homes, saving the State over \$10.3 million dollars in 2015.

If funding for the Independent Living Centers is eliminated, we stand to lose federal funding since we will not have state funds to match it. Persons with disabilities employed at our centers will lose their jobs. Without the state's support to independent living centers, those who have transitioned from nursing homes to the community, might be in jeopardy of returning these institutions, which would ultimately mean increased costs to the state. The MFP Program in partnership with the Independent Living Centers is changing the system for people with disabilities and elders who once believed the only place they could live was in an institution. They are now living full and productive lives in their comfort of their own apartments with in home services to support them. In 2015 alone, CIL's provided services to 422 people with disabilities that prevented institutionalization. It goes without saying: we are doing something right

here.

Loss of funding will severely impede the services we provide as well as the number of people we can serve. Loss of funding will mean a reduction of vital independent living services across the State. Our centers are a lifeline to other services for people with disabilities, a population often overlooked by the general populous. Our centers serve children, youth, adults and elders who present with an array of disabilities, and come from all walks of life. Some have very complex needs, ranging from severe physical disabilities to cognitive and psychiatric disabilities and present a variety of reasons for our assistance/advocacy.

The outcome would be devastating for the consumers we serve. They would lose many vital supports that currently assist them in achieving a greater level of independence, and also the connection with peers and staff at the centers who have become champions in their lives. This would be truly disastrous for the lives of many individuals with disabilities, who have already had to overcome so much.

Please support our centers by continuing to provide the funding stream needed to help our consumers create a more fulfilling and independent life.

Respectfully Submitted by:
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