

TESTIMONY OF CANDACE LOW, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INDEPENDENCE UNLIMITED FOR THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE, FEBRUARY 11, 2016

Good Evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the committee. I am executive director of Independence Unlimited, a center for independent living located in Hartford. I am here once again to talk about the elimination of the independent living centers. I also want to talk about the proposed method of budgeting as well as the amount of cuts to discretionary programs proposed.

We understand that the state is facing a financial crisis and that this crisis has been building for a long period of time without an adequate solution. We also know that we cannot continue to run agencies and programs in the manner that we have in the past. That being said, I question the proposal to cut agencies that have a proven track record of being cost effective and successful in serving the states most vulnerable populations. The independent living centers provide a vast array of services to help persons with disabilities live in the community of transition to community based services from institutions. I believe the figures on our flyer speak for themselves about the amount of service we provide for a small amount of state dollars. I am asking that the committee please restore the funding for the independent living centers.

I also want to mention the impact of cutting discretionary programs by 15%. These cuts greatly impact persons with disabilities including mental health disabilities, people who are poor, and other vulnerable citizens. This also includes independent living centers and programs that are already at or below bare ones capacity. Throughout the years, these programs have been cut while the demand has risen. We are jeopardizing human lives, lives of people who want to be a part of the community, who want to work, who want to be valued and who each have something unique to contribute to our state. For years we have balanced the budget on the backs of those who need our help the most. It will cost the state many times over the amount that is used to fund these non-profit programs to help these vulnerable populations if the discretionary funding receives a drastic cut. I am asking that the committee review those cuts and make them less harsh.

The last thing I want to address is the method that is being proposed to develop and approve the budget. I believe that placing all funds under "agency operations" and eliminating the individual line items removes the transparency of the process as well as takes the power away from the people. Our country was founded on "we the people". Eliminating the line items, committees and hearings concentrate the power in a place other than with the people. Not all services are the same or have the same impact or are cost effective and without the line item determination we currently have the process is greatly flawed.