

Senator Bai, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee, My name is Bill Knight, and I am submitting this testimony regarding the elimination of funds for the state-wide network of Centers for Independent Living. In the “infinite wisdom” of the Comissioner Amy Porter of the Department of Rehabilitation Services, has decided not include any state funding for these centers. This proposal is before your committee at today’s hearing, and I am vehemently opposed to it. It’s my opinion that Comissioner Porter is making a mistake in not including funds for them in her proposed budget.

While there is no question that our state is in a “budget crisis”, those are the words of Governor Malloy and not mine, elininating funding to services that allow people with disabilities to be as independent as possible is unthinkable to me. If the Department of Rehabilitation Services budget containing this line item having been eliminated receives a favorable report out of your committee, it will be a step backwards for people who are disabled living in our state.

The Centers for Independent Living provide core services which allow the disability community to live, work, and be a vibrant part of the community of their choice. These services include: information and referral, individual and systems advocacy, independent living skills, and peer counseling. If these services cannot continue to be provided by the Centers for Independent Living, people who are disabled will find it difficult, if not impossible, to continue to lead productive lives in the community of their choice.

While this budget proposal by Comissioner Porter, might save the state some money in the near future, it will be more costly in the long run. This is so because funding to the centers from the federal government will decrease because there will be no matching funds from the state. It will become more costly to provide services to people who are disabled because of the settings and higher costs for the provision of these services.

In conclusion I am urging the Appropriations Committee to reject the elimination of funds for Centers of Independent Living in the Department of Rehabilitation Services budget. In my view, it is not just the right thing to do, but restoring the funding for this line item in her budget is also the most cost effective.

Submitted by Bill Knight
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