

TESTIMONY OF SHELBY POWELL BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS SUB COMMITTEE
Department of Rehabilitative Services Budget (DORS)
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, FEBRUARY 11, 2016

Good evening. I would like to thank the Appropriations Committee for the chance to speak tonight. My name is Shelby Powell; I am a resident of the City of Hartford. I am here to ask you to restore funding to the Independent Living Centers in Connecticut, including the Center in the Greater Hartford area, Independence Unlimited.

As an individual with both Autism and mental health disabilities, I have been a consumer at Independence Unlimited for four years. With the help of my advocates, I am now living more independently outside of my parents' home and am enjoying the freedom to make my own decisions about where I want to go and what I want to do with my time. I have also been learning a lot of the skills that you need to live on your own, such as doing laundry, going to the bank, paying my own bills and, my favorite thing, shopping!

These things may not seem important but, before I started going to Independence Unlimited, a lot of people in my life didn't think that I could learn these skills because my Autism causes me to process information differently and feel things with my senses in a different way than other people. But, my advocates at Independence Unlimited believed in me and gave me the tools I needed to be more independent. They also taught me that there are people out there who are just like me and, that having a disability doesn't mean that you can't accomplish your goals.

I have learned so much that, with the help of Independence Unlimited and another local non-profit organization, I have become a "Super Advocate", which allows me to use my knowledge and skills to help myself, and my peers, advocate for the services we need. I can even use some holistic tools to relax both my mind and my body, which are very valuable to me.

I am proud of the fact that I have accomplished so many goals already but, I have many more to look forward to. Someday, I would like to live in my own apartment and, be able to manage my own support staff; I will need the help of my advocates at Independence Unlimited to be able to reach this goal.

Independence Unlimited provides many important services, with very little money. They provide services like skills training, peer counseling, advocacy and pre-employment skills training to me and many others, every day. One of the most meaningful things they have done for me is teach me that I can be independent and successful in my life and I can help other people with disabilities be independent and successful too.

I would like to thank you for listening. Please reconsider cutting the funds for the Centers for Independent Living because, people with disabilities need these services to help them achieve their goals and dreams.