

Testimony of Ron Sparks

Appropriations Committee

February 11, 2016

Department of Rehabilitation Services

My name is Ron Sparks and I live in Hamden. I'm writing to urge you to restore full state funding for CT's independent living centers.

First, let me commend you for your support in keeping Centers for Independent Living (CIL) in the budget over the last several years. Each year you have analyzed the facts, and made the decision that the services provided were worth the relatively small amount of funding the state contributes. These facts have not changed. The benefits are well noted in the 2016 Independent Living Flyer. Just looking at the, more than, \$10 million in savings over the last year would be enough for me to be in favor of restoring the Centers in the budget. I submit that tax dollars, that my neighbors and I pay, are well spent by including support for CILs in our state budget.

Second, I would like to comment on the proposal to place commissioners in charge of deciding what programs should receive funds from our taxes. Without the ability to vote for the person making these financial decisions, the people of the State of Connecticut lose their representation. As a citizen, I resent the idea of diverting the power from our representatives, to appointed employees of the state.

These issues will directly affect where my support goes during the next election.

In my experience as an employee of Independence Northwest, I have witnessed the benefits. I have worked as an Advocate for people with disabilities, and as a Transition Coordinator, under the Money Follows the Person Demonstration (MFP), contracted by DSS. As a Transition Coordinator for the past 5 years, I have assisted 88 people with disabilities and elders move to a community residence from skilled or acute nursing facilities. Although my salary is a part of the MFP contract, the funds in jeopardy subsidize many of the needs for our consumers, and help them stay out of institutions. Our center is currently funded for four full time MFP employees.

As you may know, the long term care dollars spent under the first year of MFP is reimbursed more than 75 percent for the first year. I have also tracked the amount of savings, on average, of a care plan in the community vs. the care plans in nursing facilities. The average cost in community long term care of consumers I've worked with saves more than 30 percent compared to what was paid to nursing facilities. These savings can carry on many years. Several of my consumers have plans that save state dollars, and have faced challenges that would not be covered by MFP funding. Without support coming from the state ILC funds, these people would be in jeopardy of returning to institutions, where costs to the state would be increased.

The MFP program, and by extension the CILs, are not only saving the state money. They are also changing the system that now concludes that people with disabilities and elders can only live their lives in the safety of an institution. This has been determined to be discrimination by the U.S. Supreme Court, and we are helping to give people options and choices that they previously have not had. As we all age and require some assistance, making sure that we have these choices are a priority to me. I hope that you see the benefits as well.

I know that every consumer that I have helped move into the community felt like a captive and are now free to participate in the community in ways that medical professionals never thought possible. Please support restoring funding to Centers in full. It is an investment that is paying off in dollars and in freedom.

Thank you,

Ron Sparks