

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

Good evening, members of the committee. My name is Jade Vail; I am from Manchester Connecticut. I am a person with a physical disability and I am an advocate at Independence Unlimited, Inc. Independence Unlimited is a non-residential, non-profit independent living center that serves a diverse population of people with disabilities in Hartford county. I am asking that you restore funding for Independent Living Center (ILC's) in the state budget for core services that include advocacy, peer counseling, skills training and information and referral services. The ILC's serve all disabilities and all ages as well as family members of people with disabilities. The loss of state dollars will have a dangerously negative impact on the ability of CT ILC's to provide vital services to residents of Connecticut, at a time when an even greater number of citizens, especially people with disabilities, need the help of our State's social service programs. The ILC's are a vital component of the safety net for people with disabilities.

At a time in Connecticut's history where every dollar spent is being analyzed for its potential return on investment, ILCs are able to do an abundance of good for some of the most at risk residents of the state, all for very little money. In the year 2015 alone, advocates worked tirelessly, every day, to provide skills training and resources to approximately 22,000 people who wanted to transition from nursing homes to community based living situations or, who sought to prevent premature entry into an institution by strengthening the skills they need to live more independently in their communities. These consumers gained important information about what their rights are as citizens with disabilities, and were given the opportunity to strengthen or learn basic, yet essential, life-skills such as budgeting, disaster preparedness skills, and how to manage Personal Care Assistants. All of this was done, across five Centers, for just under \$500,000 yet, we saved the State almost 20 times that amount in costs associated with nursing home care.

In addition to being cost effective, the work done by Independence Unlimited and our sister centers demonstrates the abilities of people with disabilities to be productive and successful, both personally and professionally. Many of the consumers who walk through the doors of our ILCs go from feeling disenfranchised and unheard, to feeling self-assured and valued. I know this first-hand because, in 2008, I was homeless, jobless, and feeling powerless to make a constructive impact in my own life, much less in my community. It was because of the independent living skills training, peer counseling and, advocacy that I received from the IU staff, that I have been able to blossom into a confident, contributing member of society; who lives independently in her own home, pays taxes, and has a job paying forward the life-changing services that were provided to me, eight years ago.

There is no doubt that some tough decisions will have to be made this fiscal year but, trying to balance the budget on the backs of Connecticut's most at risk citizens is wrong. I am asking you to please restore funding to the Independent Living Centers in the 2016/2017 budget. Please do your part to help us continue to help people with disabilities in Connecticut. People like me, who want nothing more than to be productive, contributing members of our State. Thank you very much for your time.