

Testimony of Kendrick De Jesus
Appropriations Sub-Committee Public Hearing
February 19, 2020

Increase Funding to CT's Independent Living Centers

I've had the honor of being a part of the Independent Living movement for over 4 years now. During those 4 years, I was truly able to see how much of a difference Independent Living Centers make when it comes to empowering individuals with disabilities and allowing them to live independently. The centers are staffed by qualified individuals with disabilities and help others with disabilities live independently, and I've witnessed firsthand the fruits of their labor.

I was given the privilege to shadow and travel with other members of the center as well as work alongside them, and the work they've done for others is nothing short of amazing. The centers provide many great services to build independence, from peer counseling and advocacy to educational services. They allow individuals to find a home, continue their education, and obtain employment. They've also helped me obtain a driver's license, live on my own and helped me find a job. The independent living centers provide a single point of entry into disability services and also allow individuals to move out of nursing homes back into the community under Money Follows the Person, which also saves the states millions of dollars in institutional and medical costs.

I am asking that funding for the centers and deaf services be increased to \$1.3 million, which will be divided equally among the centers. Without proper funding, the amount of services and the number of towns they can serve have been drastically reduced and will also cost the state more in Medicaid, unemployment and institutional costs. Many will lose their homes, their jobs, and their independence. Funding for Independent Living Centers has been continually reduced in the past, and I am thankful that we have not been removed this year.

However, I ask that you please increase funding for the Independent Living Centers by \$1.3 million to hire a full-time Deaf Advocate and general Independent Living Advocate so that Independent Living Centers can continue helping more individuals with disabilities live independently in the community, where they earn and spend money, pay taxes, and avoid costly institutional placements and other state services while simultaneously saving the state money. It is undoubtedly a long-term benefit for everyone; Investing in the Centers now not only helps with current budget issues, but also helps lay down the ground work for the future in lowering costs and meeting needs.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kendrick De Jesus
Beacon Falls, CT