

Testimony of Norah Farris
Appropriations - Human Services Public Hearing
February 19, 2020

Hi, my name is Norah Farris and I am a home owner and resident of New Milford, Connecticut. I'm here on behalf of Connecticut's Independent Living Centers for your continued support and an increase of funding for this wonderful program.

In December of 2012, I was diagnosed with stage 4 bladder cancer. I was no longer able to work and received medical assistance from Medicaid. Thankfully I was able to beat the cancer, but after multiple surgeries I was left with debilitating Complications that require the ongoing use of briefs. After being disabled for two years, I was put on Medicare; which does not cover incontinence products, and I could no longer qualify for Medicaid without a spend down that was beyond what I could afford on a fixed income due to my disability.

After being in the healthcare field for nearly thirty years I consider myself knowledgeable and I'm a strong advocate for myself, yet after years of trying I was still unable to get approved for the incontinence supplies I needed. I can only imagine how others less fortunate and persistent than I struggle with the process of navigating and receiving services that could prevent much worse illnesses or expenses. For years I had to rely on supplies donated to Churches , Social Services agencies, or the generosity of friends and family simply for the "luxury" of having briefs. I exhausted every resource trying to get help with covering this expense, but to no avail.

After countless Google searches I was fortunate enough to come upon independence Northwest; which is one of the five Centers for Independent Living in Connecticut. I had the pleasure of speaking with Joe Shortt; an advocate I was able to work one-on-one with, he actually cared about my wellbeing, and was very knowledgeable about Medicaid programs as well as other valuable resources. I told him about my experience and all of the programs I was told I'm not eligible for by the Department of Social Services. At this point, I had kind of given up hope! But Joe actually listening to my struggles and asked me one simple question: Do you work? I said, yes, per diem as a phlebotomist why? He then told me about Medicaid for the working disabled, an option that no one else had offered or explained to me and finally there was a light at the end of the tunnel.

Independence Northwest was able to provide funding for a large supply of briefs while the application for Medicaid for the Working Disabled was pending, which was a blessing because they are extremely expensive. Joe has spent many hours with me and the Department of Social Services advocating on my behalf but throughout the process he didn't give up and because of him I didn't either. After many years of being denied, I'm finally able to have the supplies I need and I'm comfortable. Plus, I have a new friend.

I'm Sincerely grateful for this program and thank you for your ongoing support and consideration for increased funding.

Norah Farris