

Testimony of Cecilia Lewis

Appropriations Committee 2/20/2020

Increase Funding for Independent Living Centers and Deaf Services

My name is Cecilia Lewis. I have been employed at Independence Northwest, Inc an Independent Living Center in Naugatuck, CT for over 6 years. During last year's legislative session, we were delighted that we did not experience any reductions in funding and received additional funding for deaf services. For that, we are incredibly appreciative, but we still need additional funding in order to provide services to many people with disabilities who have been on waiting lists as a result of budget cuts passed on to the centers in previous years. Independent Living Centers made certain adjustments to accommodate these cuts with staff lay-offs, reducing our service areas from CT's 169 cities and towns to only 25 to avoid closing our doors; actions which, unfortunately, resulted in consumers being wait listed for services. Today, I am writing in support of increasing funding to the Independent Living Centers at \$1.3 million

An increase in funding would help us continue to provide services at Independence Northwest, Inc., particularly, to expand services for the deaf. Funding of \$60,000 allocated to each center for deaf services in 2019 has been utilized, but only supports a part-time position and still leaves people in need for services. Additional funding would increase part-time hours of staff dedicated to deaf services to full-time. Subsequently, we are experiencing a higher volume of callers for services, additional funding would support an additional employee to provide a wide range of services to the consumers who have been waiting patiently on our wait lists.

As you know, our centers serve as a **point of entry** and a safety net provider for social services for people with disabilities who, due to cuts in programs like home heating oil supports, are being referred to our centers for assistance. Additional funding of \$130,000 per center would permit us to increase hours/add an additional staff member to provide the assistance that is much needed.

In closing, your support of our request for additional funding will help us continue to do the work you know we do so well. Your consideration is welcomed and appreciated.

Respectfully Submitted by:
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