

My name is Amy Dudek, and I am the Consumer Services Advocate for Disabilities Network of Eastern CT, DNEC, one of the five Independent Living Centers, ILC's in CT. I am testifying today to request that you fully fund the five ILC's at \$550K each. This funding formula was developed by the Indiana Business Research Center, using US Census data to prove that \$5.5 million is the actual cost to fully fund CT's Independent Living Centers. The ILC's empower people with all types of disabilities to be able to live independently within their community.

Through my work at DNEC, I have helped empower my Consumers to be able to live independently. Currently I am assisting one of my Consumers who I will call Elizabeth. Elizabeth has a musculoskeletal disorder that makes it extremely difficult to walk. She was in a nursing home and recently was able to come home. Elizabeth lives with her Mom and receives home health care. She contacted DNEC to assist her with some assistive technology devices that will help ensure her safety and to function independently especially when she is home alone. I assisted Elizabeth by setting up a Smart Home Assessment which was done by New England Assistive Technology. DNEC purchased this service for Elizabeth, allowing her to figure out the most useful devices to use in her home, including: Smart Shades, a Smart Thermostat, an Echo 10, and a Ring Video Doorbell Pro. I am continuing to assist her by networking with other agencies to ensure funding for these necessary devices. Unfortunately, there has been a delay in availability to purchase some of these devices as well as have them installed due to COVID -19.

In 2020, the Independent Living Centers experienced a 51% increase in request for services because of COVID. During 2021, DNEC has definitely experienced an increase for services requested by its Consumers because of the pandemic. Due to budget cuts, the ILC's are currently receiving \$312,972 in state funding, which funds all five Centers, \$62,594 per ILC. These funding cuts have imposed limits on the ability to provide services for our Consumers who are in need, especially with all of the challenges and numerous requests for services we have experienced during this pandemic.

My Consumer, who I will call Christine, has Multiple Sclerosis. I recently assisted her with a Loans and Grants for Accessibility Application so she can have her bathroom remodeled with a roll in shower. Christine has wanted and needed her bathroom remodeled for some time. Since she has been approved for the loan, there has been a delay in the process because of the difficulty of hiring a contractor during COVID.

Elizabeth & Christine have both said, that recently they have started to lose more of their control of movement in their own bodies, making it more challenging to function, as well as be as independent as they would like to be. Therefore, when you make your decision about funding for the Independent Living Centers, I am asking you to imagine what your life would be like if you or someone you truly loved were in Elizabeth, or Christine's shoes.