

Testimony of Cecilia Lewis

Appropriations Committee 3/04/2021

Increase Funding for Independent Living Centers to \$550K

I have been employed at Independence Northwest, Inc, an Independent Living Center in Naugatuck, CT for over 7 years. Each year we have presented our services, highlighting specific situations of the consumers we serve, who, without our help may not have received the services they needed to maintain their independence. As a member of staff at this agency, I have delighted over the times when we did not experience any drastic reductions in funding and remain incredibly appreciative for the funds we received to continue services to the deaf community. The five Independent Living Centers serve CT's 169 cities and towns. During the years I have been employed here, we have sustained many cuts, many resulting in our need to trim back on services, creating waitlists to ensure our consumers receive the services they require. Today, I am writing in support of increasing funding to the Independent Living Centers to \$550,000 for each center.

After several years of state funding cuts, CT's Independent Living Centers presently receive a total of \$312,972 in state funding. These funds are **divided** between the 5 existing centers, resulting in each center receiving just over \$62,500 for the fiscal year, a stark difference compared to funding received in the neighboring states of Massachusetts (\$714,612), Rhode Island (\$302,560) and New York (\$332,025) **per center!** At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic last year, our centers saw a 51% increase for requests for services from the disability community. Research performed by the Indiana Business Research Center in 2016, reveals that a minimum base level of \$550,000 is the true cost to fully fund CT's Independent Living Centers, per center. Additional funding would permit the centers to continue meeting the needs of those seeking services and for centers to function at optimum levels with staff dedicated to meet those needs.

Each fiscal year, it appears we are being asked to do more with less for a community that is already disenfranchised. I trust that our collective voice for an increase to a funding level of \$550K for the Independent Living Centers, per center, will not fall on deaf ears. Help us continue to do the work you know we do so well.

In closing, I want to thank you for your time, consideration and support of our request for additional funding. It will help us to be a champion to those who need assistance in maintaining their independence in the community.

Respectfully Submitted by:
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