

Testimony of Scott M. Robbins  
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing  
March 3, 2021

**Increase Funding to CT's Independent Living Centers.**

I have worked at two independent living centers in Connecticut for over twenty years. Independent Living Centers (ILC) serve persons with all types of disabilities and of all ages. I have first hand knowledge of the valuable services that CT's five independent living centers provide to people with disabilities and their families in our state. The centers, which are staffed by qualified persons with disabilities, provide information and referral to thousands of individuals each year, peer counseling, independent living skill training, institutional transition back to the community, youth transition to school and work, advocacy and deaf and veterans services.

The independent living centers are non-residential and provide a single point of entry into disability services, and several are key transition sites under the Money Follows the Person (MFP) state initiative; moving people out of nursing facilities back into the community. Not only is transitioning elders and people with disabilities back to the community from nursing facilities the right thing to do, it also saves the state millions of dollars through the enhanced Medicaid match and in institutional care. Centers for Independent Living receive limited federal funding, however the funding is to provide specific disability services. Without the state funding (through the Department of Aging & Disability Services) the centers would lose their infrastructure that subsidizes MFP, Deaf Services, Aging & Disability Resource Centers, Ticket to Work and other cost saving programs.

The ILCs are currently receiving \$312,972 in state funding which funds all 5 ILCs (**only \$62,594 per ILC**). This level of funding is the result of many years of funding cuts. The funding cuts have already forced layoffs and limits on services, including waiting lists up to 12 months. In 2020, due to COVID-19, the ILCs experienced a 51% increase in requests for services, and we anticipate further increases in 2021 and beyond. CT provides the lowest amount of state funding to its ILCs compared to our adjacent states:

New York - \$13,360,999 (for 40 ILCs)

Massachusetts - \$7,146,117 (for 10 ILCs)

Rhode Island - \$302,560 (for one ILC)  
Connecticut - \$312,972 (for 5 ILCs)

In 2016, the State Independent Living Council, a Governor appointed body, commissioned a US Census data-driven funding formula developed by the Indiana Business Research Center. The report concludes that \$5.5 million is the true cost to fully fund CT's ILCs, permitting them to meet the needs of people with disabilities across the state, with a minimum base level of state funding of \$550K per center.

In FY 19-20, when we couldn't even enter a nursing facility, the ILCs transitioned 93 people out of nursing facilities into the community, saving the state more than \$8M and saving lives and improving the quality of life for those individuals. Additionally, the ILCs helped hundreds avoid costly institutions. By helping individuals across the state to get and keep jobs, the ILCs are contributing to the economy by supporting employees who earn and spend money and pay taxes. Services provided by Connecticut's five Independent Living Centers help individuals live the lives they desire and deliver a substantial return on public investment.

The unintended result of under funding for the centers will be increased Medicaid and Unemployment Compensation costs, even greater reliance on costly state funded services and fewer people maximizing their independence. Many people with physical and psychiatric disabilities will be unable to receive vital support services and many will be stuck in costly institutional settings.

**I urge the committee to fund the independent living centers at a base level of \$550,000 each.**

Submitted by:

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