

Testimony of Rich J. Luby  
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing  
March 3, 2021

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

As an individual born with the "Abilities" of Cerebral Palsy and later diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), I have many lived experiences that showcase the essential need for an increase in Connecticut's funding for all five of our Independent Living Centers.

Independent Living Centers (ILC) serve persons with all types of disabilities and of all ages. 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.

I have had the opportunity to experience life from very differing perspectives (Cerebral Palsy / O.C.D.). It's these life experiences, mixed with access to resources similar to the ones provided by CT Independent Living Centers that have helped me overcome nontraditional challenges and drove me to develop into the man I am today. In my particular case these above services were leveraged to enhance my physical capabilities that were hindered by my disability. In turn the improvement in my physical capabilities impacted my mental and emotional state. Allowing me to truly believe that with the correct supports put in place I could be a productive capable member of society.

Growing up as a capable individual with both a noticeable and hidden disability I felt very fortunate and knew from a young age that I was going to take these abilities as a given advantage to better advocate for not only myself but the entire disability community. Fourteen (14) plus years in to my career enhancing all levels of support within Disability and Inclusion and now a current employee of one of the five CT Centers, it is clear that money taken from already under funded centers is a poor strategy, wrong allocation of resources and funding, and ultimately will more than likely cost the state more money in years to come.

In the simplest form if you do not spend the money up front to ensure that

individuals from vulnerable populations are provided with the resources to develop and build independence then you are left with many capable members of society (The disability community - One of the largest sub populations in the world) now dependent on others: **Social Security Disability for example.**

I am all about being financially responsible but I am not about complacency and an inadvertent cap on expectation of this community. Proposing to maintain the Center(s) current funding or worse cut resources keeps the disability community more reliant long term on state run programs. Fund us, invest in us, allow the Centers to foster the importance of individual independence so that a once dependent community can provide a return on that investment.

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 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.

A more detailed example of the impact that my specific center, Independence NorthWest, has on the people they serve is a program I am managing. It is our emergency preparedness program which was created in

direct response to the current pandemic. With the uncertainty of the virus, resources, response plan, and community information. We wanted to ensure the disability community was involved in their local community emergency response planning and implementation. In a 6 month period our organization has established key partnerships with community leaders, state agencies, and regional emergency preparedness committees to ensure our residents have a seat at the strategic planning table. Incorporating the voices from all sub populations allows a community to have an inclusive action plan that meets the needs of the individuals they serve.

Recent success of this program:

- Region 5 ESF 8 member - Working with FEMA and Northwest municipalities emergency preparedness departments.
- Launched collaborative Red Cross Ready emergency preparedness workshops dedicated to household/family emergency readiness 101

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:

Rich Luby  
Seymour, CT

Emergency Preparedness Program Manager &  
Housing Opportunities at Independence NorthWest  
203-729-3299

