

Testimony of Eileen M. Healy
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Independence Northwest, Inc.

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I'm Eileen Healy, the Executive Director of Independence Northwest (IN), one of two Waterbury area agencies that had been recommended for a 50% cut to our Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA) funding. My written testimony, submitted last week, was based on anticipating a 50% cut. However, on May 13th I received a phone call from Eliza Halsey, assuring me that HOPWA funding for Independence Northwest may not be cut by 50% after all. But, this change is not yet in the in writing. The people with me are some of those that would have lost - or will lose - their housing if this cut is approved. It would cause many people living with HIV & AIDS in New Haven County to become homeless. Our clients also had less than 90 days to figure out how to afford their apartments or where they were going to live. We are grateful for this potential change funding, and we will continue to advocate for our clients' needs until the funding is confirmed. We also want to address some procedural issues we encountered.

Independence Northwest is a non-residential, disability organization, serving northwest CT. We've had HOPWA contracts for over 25 years, providing high quality services to residents in Waterbury, and other towns in New Haven County. Every dollar of the federal HOPWA funding we receive pays for scattered site, rental subsidies for 27 clients and there is a waiting list of 72 people. IN subsidizes apartments in New Haven, West Haven, Ansonia, Derby, Meriden, Naugatuck, and Waterbury. We leverage funding from the Department of Housing, Broadway Cares and Title VII of WIOA to support staff, program expenses and administration.

HOPWA is HUD funding for the entire Eligible Metropolitan Statistical Area (EMSA), aka New Haven County. The City receives and administers these federal funds for the entire County. The City's application for HOPWA funds specifically states it's a regional grant, listing the eligible towns. It also lists four HOPWA Priorities, with the fourth "to ensure that services are distributed and funded equitably across the entire EMSA." The initial reason stated for the 50% cut was to retain more funding for New Haven. We recently read a statement from Mayor Elicker publicly stating funding was going to areas with the greatest need. But by cutting the Waterbury providers, the City will actually **increase** the need in our area. We asked for any written record of how the funding levels were decided and the scoring for the applications; there was no documentation and applications weren't scored. Without any rationale to support funding decisions for public dollars, including statistics or other criteria, this isn't a transparent process that stands up to scrutiny or determinations of equity across the region.

We encourage the City to establish clear, consistent criteria that benefits both applicants and reviewers. Applications must be scored against the stated criterion and reviewed by non-conflicted reviewers from across the EMSA – not only New Haven. Without a standardized process and diverse reviewers, funding decisions will be perceived to be, and may very well be, subjective and lacking in equitable distribution.

Finally, we urge you to reject a 50% cut to Independence Northwest and StayWell Health Center, and to restore flat funding of \$210K and \$105K respectively. Thank you for your consideration and attention.