CT State Independent Living Council (CT SILC)
Board of Director's Meeting Minutes
Thursday, July 15, 2026
3:00 PM

Board Members Present: Gretchen Knauff, Chris Blake, Melissa Cullen-Carter, Marc Anthony Gallucci, Corey Lee, Mark Linabury, Rich Luby, Jaclyn Pinney, Darrell Ruopp, Joe Shortt, Kim Smith, Melissa Thompson-Dooley, Emily Zambrello

Board Members Absent: Farrah Garland, Michelle Johnson, George Michna*

***Denotes non-voting members.**

Staff: Molly Cole, SILC Executive Director; Michele DuBois, Data Coordinator/Office Administrator

Guests: Sharon Heddle, Executive Director - Disabilities Network of Eastern Connecticut (DNEC)

1. **Call to Order:**

   Gretchen Knauff called the meeting to order at 3:05 p.m. A quorum was established.

2. **Welcome and Introductions:**

   Gretchen Knauff welcomed Board members, staff, and guests to the meeting.

3. **Good News:**

   - Michele DuBois shared that she had recently returned from a cruise to Bermuda, her first vacation since 2017.
   - Melissa Thompson-Dooley shared that she was looking forward to attending the upcoming NCIL Conference with Ralph and expressed appreciation for CT SILC supporting their participation.
   - Kim Smith shared that her daughter-in-law was scheduled to be induced the following week and that she was looking forward to becoming a grandmother.
   - Darrell Ruopp shared that he had recently visited family in Florida, where he enjoyed hand-cycling on several routes and spending time with his in-laws.
   - Molly Cole shared that her daughter, Amy, would be visiting while Molly attended the NCIL Conference and would remain for a visit after Molly returned.

4. **Public Comment:**

   There was no public comment.

5. **Approval of Minutes from June 17, 2026:**

   Motion: Kim Smith moved to approve the June 17, 2026, Board meeting minutes. Melissa Thompson-Dooley seconded the motion.

   Action: The minutes were approved unanimously.

6. **Treasurer's Report:**

Mark Linabury presented the financial report for the period ending June 30, 2026.

- CT SILC reported net income of approximately $42,785 for the nine months ending June 30, 2026.
- Due to continued uncertainty surrounding Part B funding for CT SILC and the Centers for Independent Living, financial activity remained lower than usual, although activity had begun to increase.
- June 30 quarterly Part B case service reporting from the CILs had not yet been fully reflected in the financial statements, resulting in some temporarily elevated balances that were expected to decrease as the end of the federal fiscal year approached.
- The bank account had been fully reconciled through June 30, 2026.
- CT SILC's financial position remained strong, with a fund balance of approximately $414,000.
- CT SILC continued to monitor spending carefully while awaiting information regarding federal funding beginning October 1, 2026.

Discussion: Board members and CIL representatives discussed year-end spending patterns for Part B and SPIL funds, including seasonal consumer needs and the use of remaining funds for approved SPIL activities before the end of the federal fiscal year.

Action: No formal vote was required for the Treasurer's Report.

7. **Executive Director's Report:**

Molly Cole gave the Executive Director's report.

Operations:

CT SILC's Program Performance Report (PPR) had been accepted following several rounds of review and revision. Other SILCs across the country had experienced similar review processes. CT SILC's July through September invoice was submitted with the quarterly report on July 8, and funding had been awarded. There was still no clear information regarding federal funding beginning October 1, 2026. Additional information was anticipated at the upcoming NCIL Conference, and CT SILC continued to be cautious in its spending while meeting required SPIL commitments.

Projects and Initiatives:

The Connecticut Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance had been meeting every other month but expected to return to more frequent meetings, potentially weekly, later in the year in preparation for what was anticipated to be a challenging legislative session.

A recent discussion also focused on utility shutoffs and barriers to energy assistance for vulnerable populations, including people with disabilities. Concerns included medical recertification requirements, access to Community Action Agencies, online application barriers, affordability, and the effect loss of utility service can have on housing and other essential needs. CT SILC was considering a future educational webinar to increase awareness of available protections, assistance programs, and related requirements.

Supported Decision Making (SDM):

The Supported Decision Making toolkit would be introduced at an October 27 event at the Sheraton for approximately 150 participants. Jonathan Martinis would present the toolkit,

and the program would include opportunities to practice SDM planning, develop and write SDM agreements, and learn how to use the toolkit. Materials would be available in hard copy and electronically. The toolkit was developed in a clear, plain-language format that is accessible to screen readers. Gretchen Knauff added that CT SILC hoped to offer continuing education units to encourage participation by educators and provide information to families.

Southbury Coalition:

The Coalition continued to focus on increasing opportunities for residents of Southbury Training School to move into community settings. The Coalition had learned that a community provider had five group homes that were vacant because of staffing shortages. Under the transition plan being considered, individuals moving from Southbury could transition with their existing staff, potentially creating additional community-placement opportunities. Molly and Gretchen Knauff were scheduled to meet with Acting DDS Commissioner Elisa Velardo on August 6 to discuss community transitions from Southbury and other pressing issues.

2026 Nonpartisan Candidates Forum:

Planning for the 2026 Nonpartisan Candidates Forum continued to move forward. The Connecticut Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance was developing separate sets of questions for congressional and state candidates, including questions submitted by the Wheelchair Repair Coalition and other groups. Background information was also being developed to support the questions provided to moderator Diane Smith. Board members and others with additional proposed questions were encouraged to submit them promptly.

CT SILC was awaiting the results of the primary elections before beginning candidate invitations and scheduling. Work was underway with the production company, and Molly Cole and Michele DuBois expected to meet with the Bristol Event Center in August to finalize event arrangements. Following the primary, CT SILC planned to obtain the complete ballot from the Secretary of the State's Office and begin scheduling candidates around their campaign commitments.

During discussion, Corey Lee asked about public attendance and the candidate-question process. The Forum is free and open to the public, with registration requested for in-person and virtual participation. The moderator receives a prepared set of questions in advance and selects from those questions during the Forum, with some questions developed specifically for particular statewide offices. Corey emphasized the importance of including wheelchair repair among the issues addressed.

36th Anniversary of the ADA Commemoration:

The July 27 event, co-sponsored by CT SILC and CT ADAPT, would be held at the Legislative Office Building. The event would include a reception in the second-floor atrium from 1:00 to 1:30 p.m., followed by a formal program in Room 2C from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. The program would highlight the promise of the Americans with Disabilities Act while addressing continuing accessibility barriers at the State Capitol and Legislative Office Building.

Training:

The July 9 Sheltering in Place webinar, presented by the Partnership for Inclusive Disaster

Strategies through the Emergency Preparedness Committee, had 49 people registered. The training was recorded and was part of CT SILC's SPIL emergency preparedness activities. CT SILC would also host statewide documentation and case notes training for CIL staff on September 10 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. A small working group continued to work with Dr. Jenn Berton to prepare the training for the CILs.

National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) Conference:

Molly Cole and Melissa Thompson-Dooley would attend the upcoming NCIL Conference in Washington, D.C. One congressional meeting had been scheduled, and CT SILC planned to provide informational packets to Connecticut congressional offices even if additional meetings could not be arranged.

REV UP:

CT SILC was exploring voter outreach and registration opportunities at Veterans Stand Down events being held at six locations throughout Connecticut in September. CT SILC hoped to coordinate with CILs in the regions where the events would be held and provide REV UP and voter-registration materials. CT SILC also continued to look for opportunities to provide voter information at community events. Michelle Bishop of NDRN was scheduled to provide a brief presentation on voting rights during the July ADA event, and CT SILC was considering a more detailed voting-rights webinar later in the summer or early fall.

Discussion also addressed barriers to voter registration for people receiving developmental disability services, including individuals with guardians. Participants discussed the importance of ensuring that people with disabilities receive accurate information regarding their voting rights and opportunities to register to vote.

8. **Committee Reports:**

Data Tech Committee

Michele DuBois provided the update in Eileen Healy's absence.

- The committee continued working with Dr. Jenn Berton and the small planning group on the September 10 documentation and case notes training. The group is working to ensure that the training is useful to all five CILs and reflects Independent Living language, practices, and philosophy.
- Michele was also working with Ken from Independence Northwest on a process to improve consistency in how towns and counties are entered in the database. The process would be tested before being made available for the other CILs to incorporate into their databases.

Emergency Preparedness

Kim Smith provided the committee update.

- The Sheltering in Place webinar was held on July 9 and was well attended.
- The committee was continuing to develop a fire safety training and was working through the logistics. The committee was scheduled to meet again the following day to continue planning.

SPIL Committee

Chris Blake and Molly Cole provided the committee update.

- The community needs assessment survey had been distributed, with forty-two

responses received through the survey in addition to several responses submitted through JotForm on the CT SILC website.

- CT SILC planned to make paper copies of the survey available at upcoming community events to encourage additional participation.
- One focus group was being planned with each CIL. Focus groups could be held either in person or virtually, depending on the preference of each Center.
- Molly emphasized the need to complete the public input process so work could move forward on development of the next SPIL, which is due in June 2027. Early survey responses indicated that healthcare was emerging as a significant concern and could result in a future SPIL goal or related activities..

Board Recruitment

Rich Luby provided the committee update.

- Recruitment efforts continued to receive limited response. The committee identified possible challenges with its initial outreach approach, including emails potentially being directed to spam and outreach coming from individuals who did not have an established relationship with the recipient.
- The committee had gathered approximately 75 to 80 recent contacts and was revising its strategy so that individuals who provided contacts could conduct the outreach directly while using consistent recruitment messaging.
- Additional outreach had been made to hospitals, medical and dental offices, and a disability-focused Little League program in the Naugatuck Valley. The committee was scheduled to meet the following day to continue its recruitment work.

Discussion: Board members and CIL representatives discussed making CT SILC Board recruitment information available through the Centers for Independent Living. Discussion included the importance of CIL staff having enough familiarity with CT SILC to speak knowledgeably about Board service, opportunities for CIL staff to attend public CT SILC meetings to learn more about the organization and identifying appropriate opportunities to share recruitment information with consumers. Rich agreed to provide the recruitment materials electronically to the CILs.

9. Update on Wheelchair Repair

Corey Lee provided an update on wheelchair repair. He reported that the Wheelchair Repair Advisory Council is now under the Office of the Healthcare Advocate (OHA) and that its first meeting had been held earlier that day. Based on the portion of the meeting he attended, Corey said the work appeared to be moving forward positively. He also discussed a recent wheelchair repair rally in Boston that drew significant participation and noted that advocates in Massachusetts were looking at Connecticut's recent wheelchair repair efforts as they work to improve the timeliness of wheelchair repairs.

10. Discussion

Elections at the annual meeting

The Board reviewed the officer positions expected to be considered at the Annual Meeting, including President, Vice President, and Treasurer. The status of the Secretary position was still being confirmed based on the current term. Gretchen Knauff reviewed the roles and responsibilities of the President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary, and members were encouraged to consider serving in leadership positions. The Board agreed

to review prior meeting minutes to confirm the Secretary's term.

Members interested in running for office may notify Molly Cole or Gretchen Knauff in advance to be included on the printed ballot. Nominations may also be made from the floor at the Annual Meeting. Gretchen will remain an ad hoc member of the Executive Committee for one year, in accordance with the bylaws, to support leadership transition.

The Annual Meeting will be held Thursday, September 17, 2026, at the Chrysalis Center. The business meeting will include approval of the budget and officer elections. Public attendance will be limited based on available space and advance registration.

Orientation for CT SILC Board Members

The Board continued discussion of establishing an annual orientation for new Board members while also making it available as a refresher for current members. Members favored holding the orientation in November rather than October. For this year, the orientation would be incorporated into a regular Board meeting and was expected to take approximately one to one-and-a-half hours. In future years, the orientation could be held before a Board meeting for members who wish to participate.

Board Meeting Schedule

The Board discussed whether monthly meetings continued to be necessary when there was limited new information from one month to the next. Members discussed allowing more time for committee work while still meeting frequently enough to address federal funding, legislative, and other emerging issues. Quarterly meetings were considered, but members expressed concern that meeting only four times per year would not provide sufficient continuity. The Board generally supported moving to an every other month schedule.

Motion: Kim Smith moved to change CT SILC Board meetings from monthly to every other month. Mark Linabury seconded the motion.

Action: The motion was approved unanimously. The Board will not meet in August, and the September 17 Annual Meeting will be the next Board meeting. Michele DuBois will distribute an updated meeting calendar reflecting the new schedule.

Topics and Speakers for Future Meetings

The Board discussed future educational topics, including Medicaid work requirements, healthcare and health insurance issues, and the need to keep members informed about issues emerging ahead of the next legislative session. The planned Board orientation and required presentations from the Freedom of Information and Ethics Commissions will also need to be incorporated into future meetings.

Members discussed identifying accessible resources on Medicaid work requirements that could be shared with Board members, CILs, and consumers. Michele DuBois agreed to look for available AAPD resources and share them with the Board if appropriate.

11. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 4:41 p.m.