



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Board of EDUCATION AND SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

March 4, 2011

Testimony of:

**Brian S. Sigman
Acting Executive Director
State of Connecticut
Board of Education and Services for the Blind**

RE:

BESB Budget Proposal for fiscal years 2012 and 2013

Good morning, Chairwoman Prague, Chairwoman Hamm, Chairman Villano and distinguished members of the Human Services Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Brian Sigman and I am the Acting Executive Director of BESB, the Board of Education and Services for the Blind.

Connecticut, like most of the nation is in the throes of an unprecedented economic decline. As we are all sadly aware, Connecticut faces a deficit in fiscal year 2012 in excess of \$3 billion. My heartfelt best wishes and deep respect goes to Governor Malloy for accomplishing the monumental task of submitting a balanced budget to the Legislature. It is a tribute to his leadership that he has offered a visionary plan to reshape government, reign in costs and promote our economic recovery.

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Most certainly, given the size and scope of the deficit, decisions need to be made that will affect the lives of us all. State government is responsible for so many and varied services, from maintaining our roads and bridges, to protecting our safety and security, to providing a safety net for our most vulnerable citizens. The challenge before us all is to live within our financial means, while ensuring that the most fundamental purposes of our governmental structure can be leveraged to maintain critical services for those of our citizenry who are most in need of assistance. The Governor's budget offers these assurances, and in particular for BESB, the proposal maintains funding for direct service and support staff, along with funding for purchased services to ensure the continued delivery of vital services for people who are blind.

For those of you who are new to the Committee or may not be fully familiar with BESB, the agency provides direct services to help blind people adjust to loss of vision, and to maintain independent and productive lives. Our services span the life of our constituents, and indeed many examples exist of clients who began receiving services as children, and later moved into our vocational program to obtain college degrees and achieve productive careers. Our independent living program staff teach safety techniques to enable senior citizens to remain independent in their homes, therefore avoiding the need for nursing home placement. Last year alone, BESB staff delivered more than 25,000 hours of direct services through agency rehabilitation teachers, mobility instructors, social workers, educators and counselors. In addition, nearly 6,000 hours of support and outreach services were provided to community partners to foster opportunities in education, employment and community inclusion.

Through the establishment of performance benchmarks by our board of directors, the agency engages in continuous improvement initiatives, and consistently achieves positive outcomes. The agency has a strategic planning committee that includes representatives from organizations of and for the blind as well as agency staff at all levels. This committee has implemented numerous innovative approaches for service delivery to streamline costs and deliver a high quality of services that are reflected in BESB's Results Based Accountability report cards.

The dedicated BESB staff who deliver these vital services, along with the funding that is so important to purchase adaptive technology devices, Braille books, and specialized training are all intact in the Governor's proposed budget. Given these difficult economic times, I would like to express appreciation that this level of funding will transition to the two agencies that will assume these functions.

I wish you all the very best in the difficult work that lies ahead.

Respectfully submitted,

**Brian S. Sigman
Acting Executive Director
Board of Education and Services for the Blind**