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Good evening. My name is Christine Ford, a resident of Wallingford, CT, a member of the State Rehabilitation Council, and a client of BESB. I'm here as a member of the blind community on behalf of BESB and not as a member of the SRC.

In my junior year of college, working as an Art Major interning in Photography, my life was turned upside down when in a routine eye exam it was discovered that my vision was deteriorating, and would be gone permanently and irrevocably within a few short years.

With regret and a good dose of depression, realizing that I could no longer pursue my passion, I walked away from this life, unsure of how to step into another. Three years later, finding myself completely dependant on everyone around me, slipping into inertia, I heard about BESB and made my first call.

From my first meeting with them to now, my life changed dramatically. I went from someone totally dependant on others, to others now depending on me! All this thanks to the capable, caring professionals at BESB!

They don't just give lip service. They hire the blind, they see the value in the person despite the blindness. They look beyond the disability to what you can do, and don't get bogged down in what you can't. They get me!

They enabled me to return to school as a blind woman, and pursue a brand new career. They followed me through all the painful, deteriorating degrees of my blindness. They supported me with the latest technological aids that made it possible for me to keep up with confidence. As a result, I became a licensed, certified massage therapist who owns her own business. I've volunteered at numerous athletic events all over the state of ct. And in 2004 I had the distinct honor of being chosen to work with elite athletes from all over the world in the Olympic Village in Athens. All this thanks to BESB.

Unfortunately, I have two brothers and a sister, also blind and living in three other states. Because those states do not have a single, dedicated agency for the blind, my brothers and sister lack the services required to live up to their potential, or enjoy the level of independence that I have.

My fear is that if you disrupt the wonderful service you have in place now, the people who come after me will not have the opportunity to achieve the quality of life I have. Yes, BESB does have areas where the fat can be trimmed, but it should be done with a skillful eye and hand, with care and compassion.