

Silverman, Phyllis

From: Carol Gillispie [gillispiegeorge@sbcglobal.net]
Sent: Thursday, March 03, 2011 2:48 PM
To: Senator Harp
Subject: IMPORTANT ISSUE PLEASE READ

Mrs. Toni Harp

Dear Mrs. Harp,

I am enclosing a letter which was written to Governor Malloy. However, what I did not say in that letter I would like you to know the following:

I happen to be totally blind and have used the services from the Board of Education and Services for the blind (BESB) since I was a teenager. As a result, I was able to attain my BA Degree from Albertus Magnus College, a Master's from Southern CT, followed by gainful employment. I worked as a Rehabilitation Teacher of the blind for more than six years; I then worked in Bethesda, Maryland and Washington D.C. as a teacher, followed by the Visual Impairment Services Coordinator for the Veterans Administration in West Haven. My final job was at Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic. All of these positions were important and required responsible duties and assignments which I carried out to the best of my ability. These jobs helped make me a proud American taxpayer.

I am simply asking that you recommend that BESB remain a separate and independent agency as the needs of the blind are so unique compared to other disabilities, namely, in communications, Braille, talking computers, and identification of persons or places we do not know or cannot see.

Thanking you in advance.

Sincerely,

Carol Gillispie
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Dear Governor Malloy,

There is great concern throughout the community of people who are blind regarding the proposal to divide the services of the State of Connecticut Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) between the Departments of Education and Social Services. We respectfully suggest that such a move would be counter-productive to the worthy goals that you have set forth as governor.

In both your inaugural address and your budget address before the state legislature, you have alluded to lines in Robert Frost's poem The Road not Taken: "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I, I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference."

Because we live in a highly visual world, people experiencing vision loss take the road "less traveled by." The services provided by BESB enable us to travel that road; these services are a continuum extending from cradle to grave. Examples of these highly specialized services include working with families, reading and writing various Braille codes, accessing computers,

orientation and mobility, self-advocacy, preparation for employment and independent living. These services are all inter-related although they may be given labels such as education, vocational rehabilitation and adult services.

During your campaign, while visiting a classroom in East Lyme, you were reported to have said, "As a boy who faced a learning disability, I understand the importance of schools in helping all students reach their potential. Because my mother refused to let that disability overtake my desire to learn, and because I was taught by caring, dedicated teachers in schools that treated me as more than a test score, I was able to overcome my disability." The purpose of BESB is similar, to enable people who are blind to overcome this disability and to realize and achieve their potential. To paraphrase your first sentence, "As people who face vision loss, we understand the importance of an agency in helping all people who are blind reach their potential." Without this agency, we will become a mere statistic.

You have also spoken of efforts to enable people living in Connecticut to get jobs and to be productive members of society. Those of us who are blind are asking for the same opportunity.

We, the members of the Agency Consumer Advisory Committee, ACAC, represent approximately fifteen organizations in Connecticut of and for the blind. We affirm that BESB meets the unique needs of persons with limited or no vision. The loss of sight impacts all aspects of life, such as reading, writing, mobility and safety and independence within the home and community. The training of those who work with us is very specialized. Persons who work with people having special needs lack the specific knowledge or understanding of the unique needs of the blind. BESB has been a functioning service provider since 1893. To date, it has worked within its given budget and has maintained a high quality of services despite severe budget cuts. This type of operational efficiency will not be possible if BESB is put under an agency umbrella; people who are blind will be left out in the rain! Because of the leadership of Executive Director Brian Sigman, direct, effective services have continued throughout all departments.

We, the members of ACAC, respectfully request reconsideration of the proposal to consolidate BESB with other state agencies; keep BESB an independent state agency so that the high quality of integrated services will continue. You have spoken of the need for some of the citizens in Connecticut to have a second chance. Without effective services, we who are blind are concerned about being given even any chance to live meaningful, productive lives.

Sincerely,

Carol Gillispie, Chairperson,
 Alice Jackson, Vice President,
 Eileen Akers, Secretary,
 Lewis Andrews, Blinded Veterans Association of CT,
 Judy Tencza, Visual Impairment Services Team, V. A. Connecticut,
 Barbara Bostwick, Executive Director, S.E. CT Community Center of the Blind,
 Pamela Garde, Fidelco,
 JuneRose Killian, Member-at-large,
 Jan Davison, Member-at-large,
 Maryann Lagocki, Lions Club,
 Dave Bates, Small Business
 Bruce Woodward, NFB of CT
 Barbara Blejewski, Member-at-Large,
 Steve Famiglietti, Oak Hill

Carol Gillispie

3/3/2011