Dear Appropriations Committee,

My name is Michael Matis. I am Director of Information Technology at the University of Maine at Machias, a small campus located on the coast of eastern Maine, and I am a student at the University of Maine in their Masters of Education program. I am also legally blind.

While I am currently a Maine resident, I spent my childhood and adolescence in Stratford, Connecticut where my parents and younger brothers still reside. It is on their behalf that I am writing you today; to implore you not to include the Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) in the organizational and budget changes you have proposed.

As a child growing up in Connecticut, I received substantial educational and vocational aid from BESB. My career, which deals extensively with computers and technology, was sparked thanks to a computer given to me by the state through BESB. My love for books and reading was sparked by the hundreds of large-print and cassette books I was exposed to through BESB.

In addition to these services, the people who represented BESB played key roles as advisers and mentors who augmented my education. They assisted me in everything from ensuring I had the assistive equipment and large-print textbooks I needed, to tutoring me in math, to teaching me to type. I was even given time with a mobility instructor to make me confident and safe while walking and using public transportation. These individuals are truly Jacks-of-all-trades and should be commended for the work that they do.

Had I been born one hundred years ago, individuals with a disorder such as mine would have been unable to receive an education, hold a job, or support a family; let alone attain an advanced degree. I am doing all of these things now, thanks to BESB. I have reached adulthood and am a fully self-reliant, productive member of society. However, my 13 year-old brother, Tom, has the same disorder as I do, and is in need of the services that BESB provides in order to have the same opportunities as children without disabilities. I know you think that no services will be lost by dividing BESB, but it will reduce the quality of these services and make them much more difficult for families to acquire. Instead of having a single point of contact, families will have to juggle several. I ask you to please consider the lives and futures of the children who will be affected by your cuts. Do you want to maintain the level of social equality that has allowed me flourish, or do you want to potentially set progress in this area back to the 1900's?

Respectfully,

Michael Patrick Matis