My name is Frank Russello Jr, a resident of Guilford, CT. My son, Alexander is legally blind. I have come to testify that I am opposed HB6380 and SB1012 bills which would consolidate the Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) into the Department of Education and the Department of Social Services.

In my view BESB has served my family very well. Dividing BESB into two components does not seem like it would save the state money, in fact it seems like it would cost more. In addition, I believe the level of service would decrease.

From a cost perspective, these two divisions share resources that would have to be duplicated, if separated. If they are not duplicated then, by definition, services would be less. As I understand it, the Assistive Technology center, low vision center, professional services, and Braille until are all shared.

I also urge you to consider the benefit of co-locating the expertise. Blind and low vision people have unique requirements in our society. BESB staff benefit from co-location. I am a project manager by trade, and I can attest to the efficiency gains of having people in the same location.

If you divide the expertise, we will lose a great deal of efficiency. This lose in efficiency will translate into degraded service and ultimately more cost. Simply put, I believe this proposal will mean my son will get less benefit, at a greater cost to the taxpayers. Less for more.

And what of Braille transcription? It would seem to me that to keep the current level of service with Braille, the State would need to purchase additional equipment, such as a Braille embosser, and hire additional staff. This duplication is clearly inefficient and strikes me as counter to the objective set forth by the Governor of operating government more efficiently.

You should also consider the additional cost for space. Braille books take up a lot of room. It is my understanding that there are about 60,000 Braille books housed by BESB. Logically, these books need space. If they are housed in one agency then additional overhead, time, and shipping between agencies will be required to get the books to the people that need them. If the books are divided, then the overhead would clearly be more.

As a manager, I am also very concerned about the very specialized staff dealing with Blind persons being managed by people who do not themselves specialize in blindness. My experience in business tells me that this type of management will put the staff at a major disadvantage. The managers of the larger agencies will not have the experience to properly assess the needs of the blind. This in turn will lead to less services for my child.

In summary, I believe this consolidation will diminish the services provided to my child and no benefit will be realized. This does not bode well for my child's future.