

Michael Rouillard

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House bill 6380

Consolidation of the Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)

My name is Michael Rouillard. I am 15 years old and was born blind. I am a high school student in Lyme, Connecticut. I use braille to do my schoolwork on a daily basis. I depend on BESB's Children's Services department to receive all of my braille books, technology, and other equipment that I need for school. If BESB is consolidated into the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the State Department of Education (SDE), the amount and quality of the services that I receive will be severely lowered. Under the new budget proposal, the Children's Services department of BESB will be consolidated into the SDE. One major concern with this consolidation proposal is lack of space. After consolidation, there will be a severe lack of space for the braille and large-print library which currently houses 60000 volumes, space and equipment for volunteer brailleists, space for 43 current children's services staff, space for student programs and facilities, space for in-service training for district personnel, space for specialized materials that will be loaned to students, and space for the professional library. The purchasing function that is now controlled by BESB would go to the SDE. The administration at BESB understands the unique needs of children who are visually impaired and provide their expertise to schools on a regular, consistent basis. If someone else who isn't familiar with the unique needs of blind students takes over the responsibility of supervising Children's Services, how are they going to know the specialized, unique needs of blind students? Is the SDE willing to give the same level of dedicated, consistent competent service that BESB currently delivers? I also have a teacher of the visually impaired (TVI) provided by BESB who visits my school on a regular, weekly basis and provides advice to me, my teachers, and my braille transcriptionist, always keeping in mind all of the unique needs and accommodations that I have. These are just few of the issues with consolidating BESB into the DSS and SDE.

With all do respect, if you or one of your family members was visually impaired and depended on these services, you would think twice about passing this bill. Try living with a blind fold on and having absolutely no vision and tell me you would not think twice about consolidating this agency. Without these services, I would not be where I am today. Thanks to BESB, I have

successfully advanced to high school. BESB allows me to have braille books and other equipment that I need to advance through school. I am typing this testimony on a regular computer using screen-reading software provided by BESB.

After reading this testimony, please reconsider consolidating BESB into other agencies.

Thank you,

Michael Rouillard