

Dear Senator Harp, Senator Prague, Representative Walker, Representative Hamm, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am asking you to vote against House Bill # 6380, which would split the Board of Education and Services for the Blind in two, and consolidate the resulting pieces with the DOE and DSS respectively.

I have been a Connecticut resident my whole life and I just learned of BESB and the services they provide five years ago. I was a preschool teacher in a private school and one of my students had a visual impairment. Not being familiar with the specific needs and services required for such a unique student, I was introduced to a wonderful TVI (Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments). She provided much needed guidance to ensure the child was provided what she needed to be successful. As a new teacher who was looking for some advice, the woman from BESB was a gift. She provided strategies and ideas that I would never have thought of. Even the simplest suggestion was welcomed due to the fact that it was all new to me.

Unfortunately, the town the school was located did not use BESB services. They had their own TVI for the district which this child fell into. Due to her being a non resident in a district school she was only provided services once a month when much more support was apparently needed. After being exposed to the BESB support and knowing it was there but could not access it fully, I relayed my thoughts to the parents to switch back to their neighborhood school which is a town that receives full services through BESB.

I left the private school and followed this particular student to her public neighborhood school. I have learned so much from being a part of this child's life. I have been her braille transcriptionist for the last three years. The support provided by her current TVI, who is employed through BESB, is immeasurable. BESB has got it all right! They provided training for me which was much needed to understand what a unique roll I would be playing while helping to support her academics. This child is currently in the second grade and is a braille reader. As a result of her braille instruction from her TVI, she is one of the top students in her class and she blends right in with the rest of the school community. I commend BESB and their wonderful training of staff and faculty to provide the best learning environment possible for visually impaired students.

As a result of being exposed to BESB and the wonderful work they do, I have decided to make a career change. I am currently in the Masters of Education Program at UMASS in Boston to become a TVI myself. The students in my classes are primarily from the New England area. I am the envy of my classmates that I live in a state with such valuable resources for the field of work we are all pursuing. The idea of a specialized agency is a goal for states to achieve. Separating BESB into two different departments will result in a step backwards for our state rather than a step forward.

Until a person close to you; whether it is you, a child, a parent, a neighbor, or a spouse in your life that begins to lose their vision, the services of BESB cannot be measured. We are all here today to show that BESB is important to our state and its visually impaired residents. The separation will not help the state, but hurt it. Instead of separating the department, please give CT the chance to be the role model it is to

our neighboring states and to provide guidance to them to take the necessary steps forward to provide services such as the ones offered at BESB to their residents as well.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Borysewicz