

Appropriations Committee Hearing on HB 6380

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

My name is Linda Steller and I am a certified special education teacher of students with visual impairments. I also serve as the Secretary of the Connecticut Association of Teachers of the Visually Impaired (CATVI).

I oppose the passage of Appropriates House Bill 6380 which would result in the division of BESB.

I have taught children with visual impairments in Connecticut since 1983 and currently am employed by ACES (Area Cooperative Educational Services) serving 25 students with visual impairments who are clients of BESB and reside in Milford and West Haven.

BESB provides a coordinated approach to the lifelong needs of individuals with visual impairments through the departments of preschool, school age, special services, vocational rehabilitation, adult services, and business enterprise programs. My students represent a low incidence population with highly specialized needs. **I cannot overstate the significance of BESB's operation as a centralized agency in providing continuity of service.** BESB has supported my past and present students' individual needs by providing large print and braille literacy materials and vision related materials and equipment. BESB offers low vision evaluations, as well as parent outreach and training. In addition, BESB sponsors annual classroom teacher in-services, paraprofessional training, and professional development for teachers of students with visual impairments.

The students I serve range in age, degree of vision loss, and abilities. Some of my students are the only individuals with a visual impairment in their school which can be isolating. BESB sponsors programming such as experiential field trips, essential skills training, summer camps, recreational programs, and transition experiences which give my students the opportunities to socialize, support and learn from one another.

If BESB is absorbed within larger agencies which lack the specialized knowledge of the blindness field needed to support this population, the service to our students and their families will be compromised. A split in the agency would affect the continuity of service which is present now because of the shared expertise across divisions.

Over the past 28 years I have had the privilege of teaching children with visual impairments ages 5-21 with varying degrees of vision loss and learning styles. My students have had the opportunity to reach their potential as an individual with a visual impairment because of the ongoing support as well as the quality of services provided by BESB.

I would like to thank the committee for your consideration in opposing HB 6380.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda M. Steller, M.A. Teacher

Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments