

Dear Senators/Representatives

I am testifying today in regards to the bill HB6380 which recommends consolidating various state agencies. I realize that the state of Connecticut is in financial trouble, but I ask you at what expense are you willing to save Connecticut money. BESB provides vital services for the Blind, and without their services, I would not have been able to testify that the blind need BESB.

Without BESB, the 50% unemployment rate for the blind will rise to around 75%. The 95% graduation rate for high school students who are blind will decrease to the national average of 55%. The reason why I bring these facts to your attention is cause I could have fallen through the cracks and be unemployed without a college degree or even a high school diploma. BESB supported me during my early childhood up until after my graduation from the University of Connecticut. Through my early youth, they provided education, rehabilitation, and mobility services. As I got older they provided visual aids, vocational skills, supported my college education, and paid for necessary eye exams, contacts, and glasses. My parents knew nothing about raising a legally blind child, but BESB assisted my parents on my development to have a normal life.

Despite the fact that I am legally blind, I aspired to do things that most individuals would think that a visually impaired person would not be able to do. I studied photography at the University of Connecticut and, I photographed the 1995 Special Olympic World Games in New Haven. In 2000, I participated in the Boston to New York AIDS Ride in which I rode my bike for 275 miles and raised 1,700 dollars for AIDS research. Without BESB, I would not have had the skills to take part in these events or graduate from UConn.

I am very fortunate that BESB provided rehabilitation services for me as a child, and vocational skills as an adult. If it was up to a minority of people, I would not have been able to attend a mainstream school or graduate from a conventional college. BESB was my advocate and know I am not only an advocate for BESB, but I am also an activist for the blind. Blind children deserve to have a normal life, and be able to follow their dreams. Blind students will not get the same type of service if BESB is consolidated into other agencies as compared to the service that I had when I was a child. By consolidating BESB, this Bill would actually be cutting services. I urge you not to merge BESB at the expense of the blind because in the long run Connecticut will pay a heavy price.

Sincerely Yours,

Thomas A Barretta  
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