

Testimony for Appropriations Committee

Re: Consolidation of BESB

Date: March 3, 2011

From: Sandra Kush of West Hartford, CT  
BESB Client since 2006

I. Condition/status

1998-Retinitis pigmentosa diagnosis, a progressive eye disease

2005- Driver's license given up

2006- BESB Client

Retired on disability from public school teaching career

2006-2010 – Volunteering at Elmwood Senior Center {ESC}

2010 -BESB on the job training internship at ESC

2011- Employed at Elmwood Senior Center in West Hartford as  
a Recreation Coordinator

2, How BESB's protocol, specialized instruction, client's services and vocational program gave me my life back.

2a. PROTOCOL – INITIAL Contact

BESB's initial contact protocol was informative, practical, supportive, encouraging and gave me hope. As an MBA and Certified Teacher, I was hopelessly overwhelmed by the situation I was in.

2b. IMMEDIATE SPECIALIZED INSTRUCTION

The specialized instruction for basic life skills that I received in my home was a life saver for me, my husband and my son. I learned to more safely navigate my home, do daily chores, organize my kitchen , files , phone numbers and many, many day to day activities that the sighted person takes for granted. BESB provided simple, low cost items to aid my daily existence, i.e. raised bumps to put on a microwave and other "on" buttons in my home, large print calendars [which I can't see anymore but were very helpful at the time], large spaced lined paper, special black marker etc. This Rehabilitation teacher is extremely well trained and also very resourceful.

?Question: Will the consolidation provide specialists in the needs of the blind who are also resourceful in tools and techniques for the home on a personalized home visit basis?

?Question: Will the consolidation provide effective timely outreach, i.e. within two weeks of request for service? The impact of bureaucratic jockeying for timely and effective assessment and instruction alone would be devastating to many individuals and families.

## 2c. LOW VISION SUPPORT GROUPS

Client services guided me towards a BESB Low Vision Support Group held at the Elmwood Senior Center. This 8 week program covered essential topics that the home visits did not address. Professional speakers volunteered their time to teach us all about the Library for the Blind, tools and techniques for effective mobility, lighting, paper management, technology choices and usage. In addition, many invaluable state, regional and national resources and legal rights were explained. The key to success with this program was its proximity. The van could pick us up and bring us home. BESB has worked hard and has been successful at implementing these programs around the state.

? Question? Will these outreach programs be implemented and staffed appropriately? No, because now you would be creating a competitive disabled population.

Those who have the power of sight will not recognize the life giving impact that these support groups has.

## 2d. Vocational/Technology Services.

Without the specialized knowledge of BESB personnel, I would be sitting at home basically doing nothing. BESB taught me how I could read again by accessing the Library for the Blind and the libraries free downloadable books. BESB trained me on Zoomtext which brought me back into the workplace. Zoomtext allows one to enlarge websites, emails, word documents etc and also reads it to you as your vision deteriorates.

With the support of my vocational counselor, I would not feel like a contributing member of society. The structured vocational plan with specific goals is an extremely professional and effective means of transforming a blind person's life. The technology support in the workplace in addition to Zoomtext allows me to use the brain God gave me. The BESB on the job training internship has giving me the gift of employment again.

? Question: How could the consolidation ensure the right of every blind individual to active employment? BESB staff has a system which provides specialized job seeking tools and techniques, networks of contacts, support for the employer and the employee in the workplace. How will the working blind population have access to the technology they desperately need to work at a very simple or extremely complex job?????

## 3. CONCLUSION

BESB is an essential agency in its own right. To deny the members of the blind community BESB's direct services will result in disenfranchisement

and should be considered immoral. To disband it is illogical, self serving and an affront to the Constitution's concept of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. act.