

Elizabeth A. Richter
House Bill #6380 – In Opposition
March 4, 2011

My name is Elizabeth Richter and I am from Canton, Connecticut. I am the mother of two children with albinism—Pamela and Mollie—both of whom are legally blind.

I am here today to oppose HB #6380 which proposes to consolidate the Board of Education for the Blind with the Department of Social Services and the State Department of Education.

My children have directly benefited from the excellence of the caseworkers at the Board of Education and Services for the Blind. For example, when my daughter, Mollie, refused to walk as a toddler, a mobility therapist from the board came to help working on getting her to walk. It was a very difficult process and both Mollie cried and I cried seeing what she had to go through, but eventually she was able to manage it.

At school, my children have faced several challenges. Often, they cannot see the writing on the board or they are unable to see the bulletin boards or the displays in the classroom. With the help of caseworkers from the Board, my children's teachers received specialized training so that they could adjust the way they teach and how they decorate their classrooms so that my children are still able to learn despite their disabilities.

With the help of caseworkers from the Board of Education and Services to the Blind, teachers have learned to be sensitive to how not being able to see affects their ability to learn. Caseworkers also participate in all 504 meetings

bringing to the table their expertise and applying it to the knowledge which they have gained through observing the children.

We have been helped by receiving new glasses so the children can see, special equipment so the children can see what is on the board and expand the print of any handouts they need. We have also been assisted by special telescopes so the children can see long distance, and regular contributions of large print textbooks so that they can keep up with other kids in class.

One of the most important areas in which the Board has been helpful is in bringing the Children who have visual impairments together throughout the state with the Student Activities Counsel, with field trips such as to the YMCA for wall climbing, with opportunities to learn new skills in workshops held throughout the summer.

Throughout the years, I have felt that the Board has highly qualified professionals who know exactly what I am talking about when I explain my childrens' difficulties adjusting to visual impairments. Whenever they have needed specialized care such as a low vision evaluation or assistance in adjusting to difficulties in the classroom, the Board has provided these services in a quick and efficient manner.

Now there is a proposal to dismantle the Board and consolidate it with other agencies.. We have faced this suggestion before. Again, as before, we know better that to follow through on such a destructive agenda. Taking apart the Board of Education and Services for the Blind would take apart an over a century long traditional excellence in dealing with the problems of blind and

visually impaired children and adults for which we, as Connecticut citizens, have the right to be proud.

Taking apart the Board of Education and Services for the Blind would be inefficient and destructive. Evidence shows that centralized services for the blind as embodied in the current Board of Education and Services for the Blind is the most efficient and humane way to provide services to those who are visually impaired and blind.

If we lose this centralized Board, we will lose competence, we will lose efficiency, we will lose an institution that embodies a tradition and maintains an accumulation of wisdom and resources which has been invaluable to those with visual impairments for years. This bill is mean spirited in its attack against some of the most vulnerable in our midst, and it is utterly foolish. I ask you to stand up and vote against it.

Not only that. We have heard this proposal often before in these very same rooms. It is time, not only to vote against it for now, but forever.

Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to speak.