

Burns, Vanessa

From: bellinghamdl@att.net
Sent: Tuesday, March 01, 2011 10:38 AM
To: AppropriationTestimony
Subject: HB6380 - Elimination of BESB

Dear Appropriation Committee Members:

Please enter into the record my support for BESB to remain as an independent agency.

My name is Don Bellingham. I am the founder and manager of a group called the Vernon Greenways Volunteers. This 45 member group supports the Vernon Parks and Recreation Department in the maintenance, enhancement and expansion of the trail system in Vernon, Ct. Last year after completing the reconstitution of the Braille Trail in town, we reached out to offer an Outing (fishing, braille trail hike, barbecue lunch and games) to middle school children from all over Connecticut associated with the BESB. The event was such a success that it will be repeated this year.

The professionalism of the BESB staff and their relationship with the 27 children (ages 8 to 14) that attended was evident. These children ranged from just legally blind to multiple disabilities (Eight could not physically participate in the fishing while four of the eight were severely disabled in wheel chairs with at least one of the four not able to take food orally).

The range in expertise needed to deal with this very diverse special needs population would seem to make sense to keep under one roof instead of splitting this operation between state agencies for the savings of what appears to be \$288,000 for the four administrative staff.

You have some very difficult decisions to make this year and I don't envy you. Lopping off the "fat" will be easy. You are going to have to cut or modify some things that are very worthwhile. We as a society do have a responsibility to those of us who are the most helpless and I believe retaining the BESB is one of those exceptions that needs to be made.

Don Bellingham
Vernon Greenways Volunteers