

My name is Stefanie Ramirez, and I am a legally blind woman with Stargardt disease. I am writing in objection to the consolidation of The Board Of Education and Services for the Blind. It is because of this fantastic stand-alone agency that I have been able to accomplish my goals as a student and now as a young working professional. I believe the consolidation of this agency would compromise the high-quality service available to people who are blind, which translates to far less effective results in terms of helping blind individuals reach their full potential.

First of all, since services for the blind are highly specialized, consolidating BESB would result in inadequate training by less-than-qualified professionals. For example, teachers for the blind must be thoroughly trained in such aspects as Braille and Accessible Technology to name a few. Consolidating BESB would result in reducing the agency's workforce, thus eliminating jobs of professionals who are qualified to train in these areas, and then distributing these duties to employees who are not skilled in these teachings. Therefore, the service delivered to the blind individual will be inadequate. And if the service is inadequate, how is a blind person supposed to learn the highly-specialized skills needed to become a productive member of society? In my experience, BESB trained me with a program called Kurzweil, so that I could manage my college textbook reading. Had I not received the superior training on this software from a qualified BESB employee, I would have struggled through my college career. Consolidating BESB would deprive people of getting the proper training they need to progress in life, so BESB should remain a stand-alone agency.

Furthermore, if BESB is consolidated, the timeliness of services being delivered will be affected dramatically. The agency will have the same number of clients to service but will have significantly less resources and man-power to keep up with the demands. After graduating college, I jumped right into the workforce, and I required specialized equipment to do my job effectively. It was BESB that made sure the necessary equipment was delivered to my workplace in a timely manner so I could start my job immediately. There are many clients of this agency who depend on equipment and services every day to maintain their day-to-day lives and if the agency is consolidated, this will negatively impact the speedy service the clients deserve.

In addition, our previous governor Jodi Rell was faced with the difficult decision to eliminate certain state agencies. The fact that The Board Of Education and Services for the Blind was spared in this decision is a testament to the fact that this organization services its clients efficiently and cost effectively. While it may seem like a good idea to consolidate this agency in an effort to save money, in the long run, this approach could backfire and actually increase costs. It is my belief that it will cost more money to maintain the impeccable level of service this agency delivers without the resources and man-power that will be cut as a result of this reduction.

In conclusion, The Board Of Education and Services for the Blind should remain a stand-alone agency because it is an efficiently-run agency that delivers timely services using irreplaceable and highly-trained professionals. To consolidate BESB would mean compromising the productivity and lives of blind people, from school-age children to