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Testimony regarding Senate Bill #1012: Governor Malloy's Proposed 2  
year Budget  
*Board of Education Services for the Blind (BESB)*  
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing  
March 3, 2011

I would like to express my concerns regarding the proposal to split the Board of Education and Services for the Blind between the Department of Education and the Department of Social Services. As a client and an employee of the agency, I can tell you that this has the potential to negatively impact the services currently rendered to the blind citizens of the state of Connecticut.

Perhaps a good place to start is by explaining some of the services the agency provides. BESB is an agency that serves the blind population from birth through all stages of life. As a client of BESB, I was given orientation and mobility training which helped me travel safely to and from school and work. A Rehabilitation Teacher also made frequent visits to my home to teach me how to cook safely as well as how to care for my clothing, clean my home, and develop a system for keeping track of my monthly finances. A Rehabilitation Technologist also visited my home to deliver assistive technology products which included a closed circuit television, screen magnification software, scanning and reading software, and eventually screen reading software when I lost my vision completely. I also worked with a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor who assisted me with going to college and finding the job that I have now. These are just some examples of services that clients of BESB might receive.

As a Rehabilitation Teacher for BESB, I work daily with clients in their homes to teach them how to use the computer with screen reading or screen magnification software. I also instruct clients in the use of other adaptive devices such as digital book players, note takers, and scanning and reading systems. By working directly with these people, I am able to have a significant impact on their ability to do things that they would more than likely not be able to accomplish independently without the technology that BESB provides. As a client myself, I can attest to how such technology helps me every day of my life in all aspects of daily living. I would not have the independence that I have today if it were not for the services and products BESB has given to me. My clients have told me on countless occasions that they feel that this is true for them as well.

I am concerned that if the agency, currently designed specifically for serving the blind, is split between agencies it could mean changes in policies and processes, such as referrals for services, that will negatively impact BESB's ability to serve our clients in the manner they are served now. Under the current leadership at BESB I, as a client for more than 25 years, feel that things have improved greatly and do not wish to see the standard of services to the blind community in Connecticut decline. This would be devastating to the state's blind citizens.

Governor Malloy stated that his budget plan would not affect the state's most needy populations. I feel that he did not consider that there are very many blind people who are indeed in need of an agency like BESB.

The BESB mission statement is **"Our mission is to provide quality educational and rehabilitative services to all people who are legally blind or deaf-blind and children who are visually impaired at no cost to our clients or their families."** And their vision statement is **"Our vision is a society in which all people who are legally blind or deaf-blind and children who are visually impaired are fully integrated into**

**our schools, communities, and workplaces with equal opportunities and benefits."  
Please help the blind community by preserving the Board of Education and Services  
for the Blind as an agency in the state of Connecticut.**

**Thank you for your time and consideration.**

**Sincerely,**

**Jolene Nemeth**