

3/4/11

House Bill #6380, specifically to address the changes to the agency for the BLIND, BESB.

I am a preschool teacher of the blind, employed by BESB

The changes being proposed in this budget do not put my job in jeopardy. I do not come before you today to protect my job. Instead, I would like to focus my remarks to what splitting this agency would do to the services we provide to the blind and visually impaired citizens of our state.

Splitting the agency into two (Educational services to Dept of Ed, Adult services to DSS) would greatly diminish the impact we have in our work. BESB would be placed within 2 large agencies that have no experience in providing direct service to the blind. Although no direct service jobs will be lost, services to the blind will be dispersed and weakened.

The goal of BESB is to support the blind and visually impaired in their quest for independent and productive lives. We do this through educational services and adult rehab services.

A mother of one of my youngest students told me this story this week. Her little son (who is one year old) was at his neurologist's office. This little boy lost his vision at 3 months old due to brain surgery to remove a tumor. His optic nerve was severely damaged. The neurologist dangled some keys in front of this little boy. When he reached up and grabbed them, the neurologist remarked: "oh, his vision is returning!" His mother had to explain to him that working with her Teacher of the Visually Impaired, we had been teaching him how to reach to sound.

I bring this example to you to demonstrate that since blindness is a low incidence disability, few people are trained or knowledgeable about their needs. Working as one, at BESB, we work together to make the agency greater than the sum of our parts. Fighting the under-employment found within the blind community, BESB employees work together to provide quality programs that include:

- o Programs for clients, parents, teachers, paraprofessionals and school district personnel. Programs that focus on daily living skills, sports, CEU trainings, deaf-blind and people with multiple disabilities. Programs that train Occupational and Physical therapists, PE teachers. Programs that emphasize technology, and vocational skills
- o Without an agency for the blind, these programs would no longer be possible to offer.

I trust that legislators will think long and hard about abolishing a 120 year old agency that provides integrated, coordinated and intensive services to the blind.

Thank you

Peggy Palmer, M. A.

Haddam, CT