Re: House Bill #6380

March 2, 2011

Dear Senator Harp, Senator Prague, Representative Walker, Representative Hamm and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Suzanne Cappiello. I am a teacher of Students with Visual Impairments and an Education Consultant for BESB in their Children's Services Division.

Our state and this committee have difficult decisions to make regarding the proposed consolidations of various state agencies. I understand and respect the need to balance our budget and reduce our indebtedness. Although I understand the need, I am here to voice that I oppose HB #6380.

The reason for my opposition concerns the potential decline in the level of services to our visually impaired and blind citizens. Although services will remain intact for the remainder of this fiscal year, what can be promised to our clients, students, and their families in fiscal years 2012 and beyond? BESB is one of the oldest and most respected agencies serving the blind in the United States. The collaboration of the internal divisions of this agency is critical to the success of BESB. Each division collaborates with one another on a daily basis to provide streamlined, efficient services to our student and adult clients. These services begin with infancy and culminate with our senior citizens. Our clients transition effectively from one division to another solely because all agency resources are located under one roof. These resources include: professionals in blindness matters, equipment for children and the agency, a Braille Library, education workshops and in-services to school districts, students, and their families. Many of these in-services are provided at the present BESB location at low or no cost to our students, clients, families and Connecticut school districts. A divided agency with multiple venues would greatly reduce the productivity of BESB and increase overall costs.

Although my preference is for BESB to remain in its present location, my ultimate appeal to the committee is that the professionals, equipment, and numerous resources not be divided among various buildings and locations but MUST stay together wherever that resting place will be.

BESB serves a very important role. Our job is to help guide and teach visually impaired and blind individuals to be independent, literate, and fully functioning members of society. We are completely accessible, have a low vision center, a Braille library, and equipment that includes a Braille embosser for agency use. Each additional Braille embosser, which would be required should we be housed separately, would cost taxpayers $50,000 per embosser. This is only one example of added expenditures in the relocating efforts.

I respectfully urge you to consider the impact of dividing this agency...lower literacy rates, decreased high school graduation rates, and higher unemployment of blind individuals who make less money than their sighted peers.

Please invest in Connecticut's future…let BESB do what they do best…build productive lives for future generations.
Thank you for your kind attention and time to his important request.

Respectfully Submitted,

Suzanne Cappiello (Education Consultant BESB)