

Subject: Appropriates HB 6380

March 2, 2011

To whom it may concern:

As a Teacher for Students with Visual Impairments I have been employed in several states. In each state I was involved in a different service delivery model. These included private contracting, working for a local school district, working for a Regional Education Service Center (RESC) and now at the Connecticut Board of Education and Services for the Blind.

It is my emphatic opinion that the most efficient delivery model is the way that BESB has strived to do since 1893. That is to provide services that encompass the lifespan of individuals who are legally blind. This model ensures the immediate continuation of services as the client transitions from one age group to another.

There are many concerns related to the proposal to split BESB into two state agencies. One of the primary concerns I have is knowing that the programs we have in place to educate parents, teachers, professional staff (OT, PT, SLPs), and paraprofessionals about such topics as the Expanded Core Curriculum for Students with Visual Impairments and Cortical Visual Impairment may be lost. At this time, we are able to provide these trainings at our facility in Windsor. Typically, 60 or more persons register for each of our sessions. Will there be a space and funding to continue our educational programs?

In addition, I believe it is essential that the person in charge of the agency (ies) which will serve the blindness community be required to have a broad knowledge and understanding of visual impairment and blindness and the implications thereof. Without that unique understanding clients will suffer as they attempt to receive services from an agency with a captain at the helm who does not recognize their unique needs.

I appreciate that your time is very valuable and extremely stretched at this turning point for our state government. So, in conclusion, I would like to ask each of you three questions. Where would you like to pursue help should you or a family member become legally blind? Would you prefer a streamlined path to the services you will need from an agency that understands your needs? Or would you like to seek assistance from agencies whose administrators will have many other issues to juggle besides blindness? To me, splitting BESB would be like having a ship at sea with a captain at the helm that came from Kansas and never sailed before.

Thank you for your precious time in the consideration of this extremely important matter.

Sincerely,

Gail A. Johnson

Teacher for Students with Visual Impairments BS/MAT

Former President of the Northeast Chapter of the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of Blind and Visually Impaired