

March 15, 2011

Members of the Human Services committee:

thank you for letting me speak to you in opposition of SB1012 (HB6380), an act which would consolidate the Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) into the Department of Education and the Department of Social Services.

I'm Chris Kuell. I'm the second Vice President of the National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut, I've been appointed to the Board of Directors of BESB twice by Senator Williams, and in 2004 then Senator Sullivan appointed me co-chair of the BESB Oversight Council. I lost my sight at age 35, so I've also been a client of BESB. I know this agency better than most, and I assure you that breaking it up makes neither financial nor logical sense.

It's simple. BESB currently delivers services to 12,000 blind, deafblind and multiply handicapped people in Connecticut. BESB is the oldest agency serving blind people in the country, and according to RSA and the Department of Education, BESB ranks in the top 5 states for high school graduation rates, job placement rates and average annual salaries.

BESB's current annual budget is \$11.6 million. Consolidation is projected to save \$400 thousand, or 0.01% of the projected state budget deficit for 2012/13.

If you research national statistics, they show unequivocally that states with independent agencies serving the blind have higher literacy rates, higher high school graduation rates, higher employment rates and higher average salaries for the clients they serve.

So, with consolidation, Connecticut will save \$400 thousand, and get lower literacy rates, lower high school graduation rates, and more unemployed blind people who make less money. Do I need to mention how costly that result would be?

I could go on to comment on the lack of accountability that will result from consolidation, that the BESB facility is fully accessible, located on a bus route, contains a successful low vision center and independent living training modules, that the Department of Education doesn't actually employ teachers or manage Braille libraries or have any desire to, but I'm nearly out of time and I think you understand my point.

Blind people want to become tax payers instead of tax users. Again, it's simple. Leave BESB alone and invest in Connecticut's future. Break it up and help drain more resources that the state can ill afford.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Christopher Kuell, Ph.D.  
Danbury, CT  
[ckuell@comcast.net](mailto:ckuell@comcast.net)