

To the chairman and members of the Human Services Committee:

Testifying in opposition to:

S.B. No. 1012 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE TRANSFER OF FUNCTIONS FROM THE BOARD OF EDUCATION AND SERVICES FOR THE BLIND AND THE COMMISSION ON THE DEAF AND HEARING IMPAIRED TO THE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES.

My name is Dennis Gallant, Ph. D. I live in Bloomfield and I am a long-time client of The Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) as well as an Adaptive Technology Specialist in the Children's Services Division of BESB.

I am testifying today in opposition to S.B. No. 1012. It is my firm belief that the breakup of the Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) as a stand alone agency would have a severe negative impact on the level of and quality of services to children who are blind and their families in Connecticut. Although the policy is in place to continue services unchanged to children who are blind, and their families, throughout Connecticut, any policies only as good as the administrative expertise and framework in place. The Department of Education has neither the experience nor the administrative framework to provide direct services to children who are blind and their families throughout Connecticut.

As a relatively small standalone agency whose only focus is on providing services to children and adults who are blind throughout Connecticut, BESB has the administrative experience and expertise to provide high-quality cost-effective services to this specialized population. BESB has been providing direct service to persons who are blind in Connecticut for over 100 years. Today, BESB is looked upon by other providers of services to the blind population throughout New England as an exemplary model of how to provide the most effective highest-quality services to both children and adults in the blind community.

Although blindness is considered one of the most frightening disabilities especially in children, it is a low incidence disability in the general population. Therefore, despite best intentions, over time the quality of and level of services provided to children who are blind, and their families, in Connecticut will gradually decrease as the staff and

mission of BESB becomes absorbed into a much larger agency with its own wide range of administrative responsibilities and culture. Thus, in reality any proposal that would break up BESB would inevitably lead to decreased services for young children who are blind, and their families, throughout the State. Under this proposal, a child born blind today could not be sure of receiving the same high-quality service that they receive from BESB today, as they grow up and enter kindergarten and beyond. Thus, this proposal puts at risk long-standing tradition of providing the highest quality of service to the most vulnerable children throughout the state.

This unfortunate circumstance need not take place especially since the leadership of BESB have testified that the amount of projected estimated savings be expected as a result of the breakup of BESB would be deducted from BESB's operating budget to cover the anticipated cost savings. Thus, keeping BESB as a standalone agency would be revenue neutral in the upcoming budget. Therefore, this proposal would only risk the quality and continuity of services to the residents of Connecticut are blind without providing any financial savings.

Finally, I asked the committee to consider the wisdom of breaking up an agency that has been in place for over 100 years, which has developed the specialized administrative and staffing expertise and experience, along with the trust of the blind community, that is also revenue neutral, with a and administrative structure and framework that will not improve services and puts at risk the high-quality cost-effective tradition of service to children who are blind currently provided by BESB throughout the state.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.