

Subject: SB #1012

3/14/2011

Dear Members of the Human Services committee,

As a certified teacher for students with visual impairments I have been employed for almost 11 years at the State of Connecticut Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) Children's Services Division. I am writing in regards to my opposition of the Senate Bill #1012 which includes the abolishment of BESB and splits the agency into two other state agencies.

The Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) was established in 1893 as an agency for a low incidence population of clients who are blind and visually impaired with unique needs to receive services from birth to death from one agency. These services have continued to be available for the past 118 years. Currently the agency has shown it is lean and accountable under the direction of an executive director who is knowledgeable in blindness.

BESB Children's Services department provides highly qualified, certified teachers for students with visual impairments (TVI) to over 1000 infants, toddlers, preschool children, deaf-blind children, and school age children throughout the state. No child with a visual impairment in CT is left behind. With the current model of service delivery, BESB is able to provide services for every child with a visual impairment which is not the case in other states where students can wait on waiting lists for years without receiving any services. Would it be acceptable for a sighted student to sit in a classroom for years without a reading teacher? This could be the reality if direct services were not available to students who have visual impairments.

In addition to daily direct services BESB provides many in-service training opportunities and programming for students using staff from across divisions to provide training in the expanded core curriculum for students. Sports adventure weekends to introduce students to the world of sports they can participate in including the skills needed for participation. In-service training for physical education teachers, occupational therapists, physical therapists, teachers and paraprofessionals throughout the year from the local school districts. BESB certified teachers provide Braille transcriptionist training to paraprofessionals from the school districts to increase the quality of services provided to students who read Braille. As evident by this list BESB

staff "go above and beyond" the day to day work with clients to provide many opportunities and work toward creating independent citizens of Connecticut despite their visual impairments.

The plan to consolidate BESB by splitting the agency among two other state agencies as put forth in senate bill #1012 would be detrimental to the services which are currently provided and not a cost savings. It would be difficult for citizens in need to find the agency when needed under different agencies letting them wonder "who should I call for services." All of the collaboration efforts between Children's Services staff and Vocational Rehabilitation and Adult Services staff would be more time consuming and difficult than walking down another aisle in the same building to ask a question or share important information.

Currently the divisions at BESB share agency resources which would need to be duplicated resulting in duplication of funding.

- Purchasing of specialized equipment
- Low vision Center
- Professional resource library
- Assistive technology lab where clients can come in for training and try out equipment prior to purchasing the equipment for a client
- Braille unit – produce Braille materials for clients
- Agency Braille Embosser – This is a piece of equipment that prints Braille – price for a new unit is approximately \$50,000
- Licensing for software used by staff to keep casenotes on each client
- Intake process would need to have additional staff to complete intakes since currently these services are shared.

I have personally recruited other employees to work in the State of Connecticut due to the model of service delivery at BESB. I would ask you to consider keeping services for the blind and visually impaired located "under one roof" with a director who is knowledgeable in blindness. The current centralized model has worked for clients for 118 years, why would the agency be split now between two other agencies?

Thank you for your attention to this matter and vote against SB #1012.

Respectfully submitted,
Lori Cornelius
Meriden, CT