

My name is Lynne Carnemolla from Tolland. It is with utmost respect to the challenge of reducing the budget that I implore you to **DENY proposed Bill SB1012** Concerning the Transfer of Functions from BESB to the Departments of Education and Social Services.

My 14 year old son has been a client of BESB since birth. We had no idea how to raise a child with a visual impairment. BESB's 118 years of service was an immeasurable body of knowledge, but it is now in jeopardy of being split apart and destroyed.

Recently I was reminded by a state representative that I have the right to ask the legislature questions and so I ask you... why? Why would you make these life-changing decisions that will significantly affect the blind community?

To try to understand I went straight to and reviewed the Governor's budget and state fiscal documents. I quickly became proud of BESB's ability to run a lean agency. In fact, according to page 407 of the budget-in-detail, year ending 6/30/11, BESB's general net fund ran a sizeable surplus.

I was then disgusted by the fact that this consolidation is being considered when the savings are **less** than the amounts already saved by BESB through streamlined processes. Why would you gamble with the blind community's quality of life when savings are minimal and possibly non-existent? Why change the current positive outcomes and **negatively affect an entire community?**

And why would you take this lean agency, split it apart and put the vocational services into a larger agency which is projecting the "largest single deficiency"¹ and which "has seen dramatic caseload increases in basic support programs."¹ If BESB becomes one cog in this giant machine, its focus will be lost and its mission inevitably diluted.

Blindness is a low incident disability which requires specialized services. Why would you take a specialized service based program, split it apart from its collaborative team and place it into a department whose mission is research and data analyses; a department that has no knowledge in providing services, especially not to the blind community.

The Departments of Social Services and Education have their own concerns and will also be subject to cutbacks, this further increases if not guarantees that BESB's mission will be diluted and the entire blind community will be affected.

Collaboratively BESB provides guidance and instruction. By splitting Children's Services and the Vocational Rehab Services you are **segregating** continuity and **impeding** on the blind community's ability to pool resources, work in partnerships, and provide continued progression. **The combined agency is critical to our community.** So why would you cut collaborative efforts and thus put our children at an **educational disadvantage?**

1. State Comptroller Kevin Lembo's February 1, 2011 monthly letter to Governor Malloy

In being part of the blind community, you accept that there are going to be certain struggles; struggles for dignity, equality, and respect. Continuity of services is a significant need.

As I prepare my Freshman son towards his future in college, I am faced with the realization that I again have little understanding of how to best prepare my son for college. And so, as I did when he was an infant, I look towards BESB for guidance. I am frightened to think that just as my son hits graduation that there will be no continuity of services provided as he enters his college and adult years because the agency was split without regard to the substantial impact on the blind community.

Why not give the agency an opportunity to meet your budget reductions? Why shouldn't you use this agency as a model of success, of fiscal responsibility, and for community empowerment? The State can realize the projected budget savings without splitting apart and destroying this agency's soul.

In the past few years, a new light has been shed on CT's blind children. Within their budget the agency has been able to expand their programs for teenagers. Programs run by people who understand the specific challenges and gifts of each blind student; Programs such as "**Camp Abilities, Peer Mentoring, LIFE, Essential Skills and Student Advisory Board.**" Historically if we wanted these services we had to go to another state. I cannot express how **valuable** it is to have these opportunities locally.

In school we have seen that when kids don't understand or know how to communicate with a visually impaired child, they aren't necessarily mean, but they do ignore them, taking advantage of their own anonymity with silence. Just because blindness is a low-incidence **minority** does not mean that our needs should be ignored. **Please** don't take advantage of our children's future by ignoring their needs and **please** don't be silent and ignore the requests of Connecticut's blind community by taking away our single binding support system. BESB is our lifeline to a brighter future.