

My name is Sharon Marie and I am writing in opposition of Bill #1012 that would transfer the Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) to the Department of Social Services and the State Department of Education.

I am a certified teacher for children with visual impairments. I have worked for BESB for the past 5 years, serving children from Birth to age five. Prior to working for this agency, I worked for individual towns in the state of Connecticut. Prior to that, I worked for DeKalb County in the state of Georgia with blind and visually impaired students.

Since moving to Connecticut, I have grown professionally under the leadership of BESB. As an itinerant teacher working for individual towns, I relied on BESB for materials, training/programs, and their expertise. They are the "go to" place for anyone who is personally dealing with vision loss or working with someone who has vision loss. BESB houses over 60,000 Braille and Large print books, has a room for Braille volunteers to create books, and houses a Low Vision Center and Professional Library. Our agency has space to offer classes and provide hands on daily living skills for our students. We provide valuable programs for students that offer independence, leadership roles and social opportunities. (We now provide programs that were only available

out-of-state, and therefore more costly.) BESB provides classes for paraprofessional and classroom teachers who work with our students, as well as physical educators, art teachers and therapists. Our technology is constantly changing and we have professionals who know what is available and can train us on how to use these unique devices and

software. Our orientation and mobility teachers are under the same roof and available to discuss strategies to reinforce travel skills. Everyone who works for our agency has the same mission, to provide for the unique needs of our blind and visually impaired clients. Breaking apart our agency would not only be a costly endeavor as we duplicate expensive materials and resource, it would break apart the mission we all share.

Please vote against Bill #1012.

Respectfully,

Sharon Maire
Teacher of the Visually Impaired