

Testimony in Opposition to Sb1012  
March 15, 2011

By  
Barbara Blejewski

Good morning/afternoon Co-chairman, and members of the Human Services Committee.

In light of Sb1012, an act implementing Governor Malloy's budget recommendations, concerning the transfer of functions from The Board of Education and Services for the Blind to the Department of Social Services and the Department of Education, legislators must be questioning why many constituents think BESB should remain a stand-alone agency. The disability of blindness is compounded by issues concerning vision loss. Professionals in the blindness field receive specialized training to teach students and newly blinded adults to read and write braille, to walk safely and independently through instruction in using a white cane, and to learn home management and cooking techniques to function safely and independently within the home. Finally, adults who are looking for employment, or adults who develop vision loss while employed, work with a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to either secure employment or enable the person who is working with vision loss to remain employed.

How has The Board of Education and Services for the Blind affected my life? As a child, I learned to read and write braille at the Oak Hill School for the blind which received funding for my education through The Board of Education and Services for the Blind. I learned to walk safely and independently through instruction in using a white cane. Thanks to a recommendation of an orientation and mobility instructor at BESB, I trained with several Seeing Eye Dogs at The Seeing Eye. I also graduated from college, and completed my master's degree in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling. This degree was necessary in order to become employed as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. I have worked in Social Services and Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling. I worked as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor at The Board of Education and Services for the Blind for eleven years. Since I learned to cook and perform other home management skills, I enjoy living within my own home.

What is the future of The Board of Education and Services for the Blind? If The Board of Education and Services for the Blind is consolidated within two agencies, children and adults who are blind will not be guaranteed training by professionals in the blindness field. Nor will there be communication and coordination of services between these professionals. This has been evidenced in other states where stand-alone agencies for the blind have been consolidated into other agencies. Therefore, I am opposed to Sb1012. thank you.