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March 13, 2011

TO: Human Services Committee
Connecticut State Legislature

RE: Senate Bill #1012
Public Hearing: March 15th at 10:00 am
Room 2A at the Legislative Office Building

The Connecticut Children's Museum and Creating Kids Childcare Center is providing testimony regarding the 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.

BESB is a statewide agency that provides seamless and coordinated services to children and people who are blind, no matter where they live in Connecticut. In this capacity, BESB has a centralized staff that are highly trained and who are able to disseminate very specialized and specific services across the State. These critical services draw their strength from BESB as a single entity based at the State level. It is a one-stop system that provides instant access to expertise in the field for every person who is blind or visually disabled. It is an agency that has accumulated the vast resources and technological supports needed by this very special population.

The Connecticut Children's Museum works with BESB to support the work of its teachers in the field. We see first hand how important the collaboration is amongst the BESB staff and how far-reaching one agency can be in providing innovative and much-needed services to families with a member who is blind.

Splitting the BESB agency will dilute its effectiveness. In a prior effort to split the agency, SDE stated that it would simply send the responsibility for children and adults who are blind to the individual towns. This is simply not a cost-effective option and is an option that would burden towns with the responsibility to invest individually in resources that already exist, and can be shared, on the State level.

I urge the State Legislature not to support the S.B. No. 1012 and to hold firm to the Connecticut Board of Education and Services for the Blind remaining a centralized agency that is nimble and most able to serve the population of blind and visually disabled individuals in our State.

Submitted by:

Sandra Malmquist – Director