

TO: Human Services Committee

FROM: Joan Tedford and Brenda Somerset

RE: Consolidation of the Board of Education and Services for the Blind into the Departments of Social Services and Education, SB1012

DATE: March 15, 2011

We are fully cognizant of the economic status of the State of Connecticut, and the challenges you face as you put together a budget package for the future.

However, we **strongly urge** you to reconsider your plan to merge the Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) with other disabilities into one large department. Members of our blind community will be severely impacted by this consolidation. Services for the blind are designed to help our visually impaired citizens become more independent in home and in business. Mobility training, counseling, job coaching and home services are just a few of the needs that BESB provides to its clients. By consolidating all disabilities into one department, the needs of the less independent and more profound will take precedence over the needs of our blind children and adults. Funds will not be dispersed equally and the blind will lose services and support which are vital for achieving independence.

This will be the second time that the state of Connecticut has impacted the lives of blind residents. Under Governor Rowland, many, many visually impaired people lost their jobs. Some of our most talented had to relocate to other states to find new employment opportunities. Many others had to wait months and years before they could once again enter the work force. Please do not impact the lives of our blind population again by stripping them of services they rightfully deserve to have in order to be independent, productive citizens of this state. They are an asset, not a liability and should be treated as such.

We appreciate that you have scheduled a hearing on this issue. We only hope that this is not just a 'polite exercise', but that you will carefully and considerately hear and heed the voices of the blind as they vehemently request that this consolidation does not take place.

Cordially,  
Joan Tedford  
Brenda Somerset