

Testimony on 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 TO THE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL
SERVICES.

Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak and members of the committee. My name is John Reilly and I am here to testify in opposition of the transfer of function from Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) to DSS and the State Dept. of Ed as outlined in Bill # 1012.

I am a certified teacher of children with visual impairments who has served children from Birth to age five at BESB for 28 years. I am also the Preschool Unit Coordinator for preschool teachers at the agency.

If you allow this division of our agency services, it will have an impact on the quality of services to blind and visually impaired children and their families. Dividing our agency will fragment the services as well as reduce the efficiency of service delivery to blind and visually impaired children and their families. Over time, I believe it will also cost the state more money than the anticipated savings.

Within our single, comprehensive agency, Children's Services is able to share efficiencies with all of the other divisions of BESB. Our shared services include:

- An assistive technology lab
- Low vision center
- Our Braille unit and library
- A shared data and intake process
- An agency embosser (\$50,000)
- Efficient and timely purchasing of specialized equipment
- In-service training for school district personnel
- A professional resource library
- And coordination of low vision services for our clients.

In addition to these operational efficiencies, we are able to share our expertise across divisions for planning and service provision including transitional services between divisions and in-service planning for school personnel across the state. The plan to divide our agency does not foster program efficiencies for the blind and visually impaired children of the state.

The State Dept. of Ed. is responsible for distributing funds to the state's school districts and is not involved in delivering direct services for individual students. This merger does not fit in with the current role of the State Dept. of Ed.

- According to this bill, the determination for eligibility of services will be with DSS. How will the referral process and eligibility determination work at the SDOE? Will the referrals be lost or delayed in a larger state bureaucracy? I believe the delivery of initial services would be impacted and in the life of a blind Infant, a two or 3 month delay can be a quarter of their life.
- How will case records be split up between the agencies? Which agency will get our data system?
- Is the SDOE in the position to implement the efficient and timely ordering and delivery of specialized books and materials to the blind and visually impaired children in the state?
- According to the bill, low vision services will become a DSS function. How will blind and visually impaired children access these low vision services in the SDOE?
- Who at the State Dept of Ed. has the experience and training to administer the specialized educational services to the blind and visually impaired? Our acting Executive Director has had years of knowledge and expertise in working in the blindness field. He is an able administrator and has implemented extensive efficiencies and accountability procedures during his tenure.
- Will services to blind and visually impaired be cut when the SDOE assumes our funding stream and is looking for a couple of million to cut from their large budget?

These questions need to be seriously considered or the services that are seamlessly provided with the current **Stand Alone** agency will be impacted and fragmented. There are no detailed plans proposed to integrate educational services for the blind and visually impaired into the State Dept of Ed. and July 1, 2011 is fast approaching.

BESB has been a **Stand Alone** agency since 1893. It is a lean, accountable state agency that seamlessly serves a low-incidence population with highly specialized needs. We do our job well. Keep us together so we can continue to provide efficient and cost effective services to blind and visually impaired children and their families.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

John Reilly East Harford, CT