

Testimony on Consolidation of the Board of Education and Services on the Blind into the Department of Education and the Department of Social Services

Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Marsha Brown and I am here to testify as a private citizen against the planned division and consolidation of the Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) into the Department of Education and the Department of Social Services.

I am currently working as a social worker at BESB in the Adult Services Division. Our division primarily provides independent living services to elderly clients of the agency who do not have vocational goals. The average age of clients served by our division is between 80 and 85; 50% of these clients are still living alone at the time of intake. The majority are legally blind because of age-related medical conditions such as macular degeneration. We help our clients regardless of age to continue to live independently in the community by providing them with low vision services, adaptive equipment, independent living aids, and specialized training such as orientation and mobility instruction and training to improve performance of activities of daily living. Our services are primarily provided on an itinerant basis in the homes of clients.

Dividing our agency would have a detrimental effect on all of our clients because we share resources. For example, our 5 social workers assigned on a regional basis in Adult Services provide intake services for the entire agency, not just our elderly clients. All of our clients use the low vision center at BESB and our assistive technology lab. We only have one Braille unit, and an agency embosser to generate Braille documents and a professional library. We share our professional expertise and we effectively transition our clients as they age out from one division's services to another. For example, our teachers in Children's Services work directly with our Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and other staff to effectively transition students from school to work.

Dividing the agency, therefore, would not only fragment the delivery of services to our clients, but in addition would not necessarily result in any cost savings. It is my understanding that the projection of cost savings by consolidating the agency is \$400,000 based on the loss of 4 administrative positions. However, the cost of moving expenses including setting up a new data system and maintaining it within the Department of Education and/or DSS, and office space for our employees would potentially far exceed any projected cost savings. We believe that collectively our Acting Executive Director and our staff can work to find you these cost savings without the destruction of our agency, founded in 1893.

Marsha Brown
Resident of Hartford, CT