

Re: Senate Bill No. 1012

Date: March 13, 2011

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee:

I am writing to express my opposition to S.B. No.1012. I have worked as a teacher of students who are blind or visually impaired in both Massachusetts and Connecticut, and have experienced first-hand the benefits of having a centralized agency that serves this low incidence population.

Under the strong leadership of the Acting Executive Director, Brian Sigman, BESB has become a highly efficient, fiscally responsible, client- centered agency. In addition to my duties as an Education Consultant, I have also served on several agency- wide committees, including BESB's Strategic Planning Committee. This committee has implemented many new initiatives to improve service delivery to our clients and streamline costs. One such initiative is the centralized service model that provides clients with an option to receive low vision evaluations, mobility instruction, rehabilitation training, and social work services all in one visit to the agency. This "one stop shopping" is not only convenient for the clients, but it also reduces staff travel time and mileage expenses.

BESB should remain as a stand-alone agency so it can best meet the needs of the blind population in Connecticut. Dividing up BESB into different agencies and locations, would result in duplicating services, equipment, and personnel, which does not seem to be a very cost effective solution to the current budget issues. For example, BESB's various divisions currently share a Braille Unit which produces Braille materials for adults and children, a low vision center, an assistive technology lab, and specialized equipment. If the divisions are divided up, each division would need its own equipment, including a Braille embosser that costs \$50,000. We also share a consolidated client database which would have to be integrated into other agencies.

By dividing up BESB's divisions between two other agencies, I fear that it is the clients who will pay the price. It is hard enough to navigate in the world when you are blind, but by dismantling BESB, you would be taking away the support system that BESB has created for children and adults who are blind over the past 118 years of its existence.

As Helen Keller, a Connecticut resident once said, "The welfare of each is bound up in the welfare of all." I believe that the dismantling of BESB would not only adversely impact the welfare of Connecticut's citizens who are blind and visually impaired, but it will ultimately cost more for all Connecticut residents.

Respectfully submitted,

Pam Perlman

Brookfield, CT