

3/14/11

Dear Committee Members of Senate Bill #1012,

I am writing today to address the proposal in Senate Bill #1012, to split and merge BESB with the Dept of Education and Dept. of Social Services. While I appreciate the efforts to decrease state spending in CT, I firmly believe that splitting BESB as an agency and merging into larger agencies is not the answer.

I am a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments working at BESB and can say that the reason I am working in CT today, is because of the unique delivery services that CT has for blind and visually impaired residents. As a teacher with more than 15 years of work experience in the field of blindness, I have had the opportunity to work in other New England states. Each state has their own ways of delivering services to the blind community. Connecticut is unique and fortunate to have a state delivery service. For instance in Massachusetts, each town is responsible for finding and employing a specialized teacher to teach Braille and other blindness related services. When I left Massachusetts to come to work for Connecticut, I later found out that a first grade Braille reader was left without services for well over a year! Can you imagine your child in school for over a year without anyone there that could produce or read the Braille language that they are learning? The town certainly tried diligently to find another teacher of Students with Visual Impairments but since this is such a low incidence disability, teachers are difficult to find.

I tell this story because I fear that if BESB is broken as a stand-alone agency, services for blind residents will slowly change and may be put back into the hands of individual towns. BESB has been an agency for over 100 years and has proven that the model works. Blindness is a unique disability and is imperative to understand the needs of blind residents in order to service them. If BESB splits as an agency, so will the knowledge of servicing blind residents. Will parents or newly blinded people even know where to find services if they are embedded in much larger agency who is not familiar with blindness specific matters?

I thank you for your time and consideration in this difficult decision that will affect blind and visually impaired residents of Connecticut.

Respectfully Submitted,

Patricia Fahle
Suffield, CT
Fahle5@cox.net