

March 14, 2011

To: The General Assembly of the State of Connecticut
Human Service Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee

From: Shirley Lebowitz
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Subject: **SB1012 – Proposal to consolidate the Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) into the Department of Social Services and the Department of Education**

We live in a world geared to sight. There are approximately 13,000 blind people in our state. Most of the information about our surroundings comes to us thru vision. The Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) has a team of well trained orientation and mobility instructors who work with each client individually. Blind people can travel about safely and with self-confidence when they are properly trained.

Blind students in all stages of education are served by the BESB. Their counselors work with the pupils, schools, faculty and parents. The blind of all ages must be taught alternative ways to read and write. Specialized teaching methods, particularly the teaching of braille, which is most important, are used.

BESB staff members play an important role in the training and placement of their clients for employment. The counselors are advocates working with employers. Blind people can be affective and reliable employees.

Skills in the techniques of daily living are also taught by the BESB teachers. Techniques of daily living such as taking care of their residence, food preparation, personal care, identification and labeling of products such as food and medications, money and many others to numerous to mention are most important.

An increasing number of seniors have become clients of BESB. Blindness need not be a reason for the elderly to feel they must stay home.

Individuals with severe sight impairment face a multitude of challenges. They require the encouragement and services of professionals in the field of blindness. The mission of BESB is to serve the special needs of the blind of our state so that they can reach their fullest potential. I am concerned that the services for the blind of all ages will be diluted and the quality and quantity will be watered down and difficult to obtain on a timely basis if BESB is consolidated into the Department of Social Services and the Department of Education. Such a merger will send members of the blind community to the end of the line. Blind people prefer to be tax payers rather than tax consumers. I urge you to vote **NO** on SB1012. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Shirley Lebowitz