

March 15, 2011

Testimony on Senate Bill 1012

Good morning distinguished committee members.

My name is Nancy Mothersele. Thank you for allowing me time to speak. I am here to ask that you not pass Senate Bill 1012 that merges BESB with the State Department of Education and the Department of Social Services.

I am the Braille Coordinator for The Board of Education and Services for the Blind and am responsible for providing the blind and visually impaired students of Connecticut with all of their Braille and large print materials needed for their education. I ensure that our students have access to the same materials as their sighted peers in their preferred format.

Beside being a BESB employee, I have a personal interest with what affects the blind and visually impaired community of Connecticut. My brother Ricky passed away from Retinoblastoma when I was four. He was totally blind. My mother worked at Oak Hill School for the Blind for over fifteen years, bringing me to the school during my vacations and sitting me in a classroom. This was daycare in the 60's. I began learning Braille when I was four. I went to wrestling matches, field trips, summer camp at Harkness. I work with several people at BESB or have spoken with clients who remember my mother and my brother. BESB was there even then. As a matter of fact, it has been in existence since 1893.

I spent seven and a half years working as a paraprofessional and Braille transcriptionist for a student who is totally blind. I began working with her in kindergarten and again in high school. The school system worked very closely with the Teachers of the Visually Impaired and Mobility Instructors from BESB. My student has now gone on to college.

Witnessing as a paraprofessional and now as an employee, how all divisions work together, whether teaching Braille to a child, transitioning a student from high school to college, helping a client find a job or start a business, I have been amazed. I have worked with adults who have just began losing their sight, and children beginning to learn Braille. I have seen a very large spectrum. The one important piece to our clients' success is the fact that all divisions are intertwined and have one main goal, to assist our clients to be

independent. This will no longer happen if BESB is merged with two different agencies. It concerns me as the Braille Coordinator that the coordinator at the State Department of Education who is in charge of accessible materials for other special education students does not know what we do at BESB and was not aware that last year, BESB processed and provided over 1,900 orders from school districts requesting Braille and large print materials. This is where our Children's Services Division will go. This is where I would go, along with a 59,000 volume library of Braille and large print books. We will be lost. We haven't even merged, and we are already lost.

Please, consider the testimony you have heard asking to keep us as one agency. The residents of Connecticut that need our services are so lucky to have one centralized agency to go to. Other states do not have this. Connecticut has been a leader in this respect.

I will leave you with a quote from Helen Keller:
The chief handicap of the blind is not blindness, but the attitude of seeing people towards them

Thank you for you time.