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Written Testimony

March 15, 2011

Human Services Committee
Legislative Office Building
300 Capital Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: Senate Bill 1012

Dear Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak, Senator Coleman, Representative Morris and Human Services Committee Members,

I am a teacher of students with visual impairments and an educational consultant for the Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB). I am writing in reference to Senate Bill 1012, which includes the elimination of BESB by moving the Children Services Division to the Department of Education and moving the remainder of the agency to the Department of Social Services. While I fully understand the current deficient our state faces as well as the need to consolidate state offices and agencies as a means to balance the budget, I do not believe the elimination of BESB will assist in saving the state the \$400,000 this bill proposes. I have many concerns regarding the implementation of this bill, the most important of which is the significant impact splitting the agency will have on services for our clients as well as the potential increase in cost to tax payers.

BESB has been servicing individuals who are blind, visually impaired and deafblind, including those with multiple impairments, for 118 years. We work collaboratively among our divisions to create high quality programs for our clients, their families, school districts and support service providers. These programs include parent education, vocational training, technology training, student skills in the area of daily living, sports programs, weekend programs, summer programs, transition programs, teacher in-services, which include those for occupational therapists, physical therapists, physical education teachers and paraprofessionals, deafblind and multiple disability training, continuing education units training and many more. We host numerous programs within our facility. This allows us to streamline services and programming, share expertise with limited impact on division personnel and minimize costs. Should this bill pass, this model of service will no longer be available to our clients, their families, or other professionals. The implications of this are far reaching and could lead to unforeseen costs to in order to provide a fraction of our services and programs.

In addition, dividing the agency will break up resources that are currently shared among our divisions resulting in the need to duplicate services, equipment and personnel. BESB shares a braille unit which produces braille for adults and children; a professional library; specialized equipment and material for the blind and low vision center; and an assistive technology lab. Special assistants and braillists do work for multiple divisions as well. The cost of reproducing these services, materials and equipment would be extensive. For example, an embosser, which is a specialized piece of equipment to produce braille,

costs about \$50,000. Close Circuit TV's can cost up to \$3000.00 each or more and Braille note takers cost approximately \$6000.00 each just to mention a few. There would also be a need to hire additional personnel to support each of the duplicated resource units and physical space to house them, resulting in more expenses.

There are a multitude of issues that will arise as a result of this bill should; it pass through the legislation. While the elimination of BESB might initially appear to be part of an effective cost savings plan, when you look at the facts you will find the cost has the potential to be much greater. In addition, A stand-alone agency can remain 100% focused on blindness matters, whereas an agency that has blindness as a small component will find it difficult to maintain a level of understanding necessary to create and direct policy that is essential to guide the blind population in Connecticut. It will be difficult for persons not familiar with the unique needs of people who are blind or visually impaired to understand why our services are important and should continue to be provided on a state level. I strongly believe that when you consider the loss of service to the clients of the Board of Education and Services for the Blind, the impact this will have on everyone that we provide training and support too and the additional costs in dividing the agency you will find that elimination of BESB is does not provide cost savings nor is it in the best interest of the constituents of the state of Connecticut.

Respectfully submitted,

Yvonne Locke
New Milford, CT