



Department of Rehabilitation Services  
Testimony before the Human Services Committee  
February 26, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Amy Porter, Commissioner of the Department of Rehabilitation Services, and I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to support House Bill 6846, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations for Human Services Programs. Our testimony focuses on Section Two of the bill which impacts our Children's Services Account, officially known as the Educational Aid for Blind and Visually Handicapped Children Account.

Our Children's Services division includes Teachers of the Visually Impaired, Rehabilitation Teachers, Orientation and Mobility Teachers and a Braille unit. These dedicated individuals work together to ensure that a child who is blind or visually impaired has the best access possible to a great education. Their goal is to put our students on a path to independence, success and full inclusion in their community.

Our efforts include a wide range of activities, including teaching students how to read and write Braille, how to use a white cane, how to adjust for their lack of vision in all aspects of their daily lives and how to advocate for themselves in the classroom and the world around them.

With this funding, we are able to provide Braille and Large Print textbooks, Zoomtext and speech-to-text software, handheld and desktop magnifiers and talking calculators, to name just a few of the ways we can help put our students on an equal footing with their peers.

We run camps such as Camp Life where we prepare teenagers for the world of work and college. Students there learn interview skills, city and campus travel, how to write a resume and what it's like to live in a dorm. At Camp Abilities, younger children learn how to take part in sports, games and recreation and sometimes learn the role of being a counselor themselves.

Perhaps the most important work of our staff, beyond educating the child, is to educate everyone around the child. We educate and advise parents, classroom teachers, special education staff, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, paraprofessionals and administrators. By educating the educator and helping the parents, we ensure that the child benefits from a focused, coordinated approach. And we bring this assistance, in any given year, to over a thousand children in more than 130 cities and towns throughout Connecticut.

We at DORS are especially proud of the great work we do in behalf of children who are blind or visually impaired. And we are proud that this work also provides invaluable support to parents, teachers, schools and towns across the entire state.

The proposed changes in this program are minor in nature, but they provide increased transparency and flexibility by allocating the program's staffing resources in the same way as all of our other state-funded programs. All salaries, as well as book and equipment purchases, will be allocated to this one account and fringe benefits will be funded from the Office of the State Comptroller consistent with our other General Fund staff. We believe that this will provide a clear picture in relation to appropriations for this program. By placing all of our expenditures on behalf of our students with blindness and visual impairment in one account, we make it easier for the agency to track program spending and easier for legislators and others to monitor and track the good work we do in this area.

Members of the Committee, thank you for your time and attention. I respectfully request that you take favorable action on House Bill 6846 and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.