



## STATE SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

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### BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

An individual is legally blind if his or her (1) central visual acuity is no greater than 20/200 in the better eye with correcting lenses or (2) visual acuity is greater than 20/200 but his or her field of vision is limited so that the field's widest diameter subtends to a maximum 20° angle.

An individual is visually impaired if his or her central acuity is no greater than 20/70 in the better eye with correcting lenses ([CGS § 10-294a](#)).

### ISSUE

What services does Connecticut provide blind individuals? Does the state provide any type of housing assistance specifically for such individuals?

### SUMMARY

The Department of Rehabilitation Services' (DORS) Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) provides a variety of services to legally blind adults and legally blind or visually impaired children and their families. In order for an individual to receive services, the applicant must submit an eye report from an eye care professional, physician, or neurologist to BESB. Upon confirmation that the individual is legally blind, or if a child, either blind or visually impaired, he or she is registered with BESB and eligible for services. The services are free and there are no income requirements.

BESB's adult services include social work, vocational, orientation and mobility, rehabilitation teaching, technology, and low vision services. BESB also provides services to children who are blind or have low vision such as functional vision assessments and exams, braille instruction, and education consultations. According to DORS, they do not provide housing assistance or living facilities for blind individuals.

More information about BESB's services is available at <http://www.ct.gov/besb/site/default.asp>.

In addition to BESB's services, blind adults who meet certain income and asset requirements are eligible for health care coverage under HUSKY C (Medicaid for the aged, blind, and disabled.) The Department of Social Services (DSS) administers HUSKY C. Additionally, DSS provides cash assistance to low-income individuals who are aged, blind, or disabled and, in most cases, receiving federal disability benefits. Under this program (State Supplement) the amount of the benefit is determined based on the living arrangement of the recipients (e.g., community, residential care home). More information about these programs is available at: <http://www.ct.gov/dss/cwp/view.asp?a=2345&q=490632>.

Legally blind individuals are also eligible for certain other benefits, such as property tax exemptions, parking passes, and discount transportation.

## **BESB SERVICES**

### ***Adult Services***

***Social Work.*** BESB social workers meet with blind adults and visually impaired children and their families after the individual or child registers for BESB services. Among other things, the social worker discusses the various services available through BESB, as well as legal benefits available to blind individuals, such as property tax exemptions, handicapped parking passes, and discount transportation. Following the initial consultation, ongoing support is available to BESB service recipients upon request.

***Vocational.*** BESB's Vocational Rehabilitation Division helps legally blind adults overcome physical, psychological, and educational barriers in order to find employment. Services the division provides include, among others:

1. assistive technology, such as special computer programs or devices, to help a blind individual perform better on the job or in school;
2. clinical and diagnostic counseling on employment and vocational planning;
3. tuition assistance for students attending four-year colleges and universities, community colleges, trade schools, and culinary institutes;
4. job-retention service to help people remain competitively employed; and
5. work evaluations, situational assessments, and computer training.

The division also provides services and counseling to high school students to help them transfer to college, vocational training, or employment.

***Orientation and Mobility.*** According to BESB, orientation and mobility services teach individuals who are legally blind how to travel safely and independently. BESB

provides various types of orientation and mobility instruction, depending on an individual's capabilities and needs, including:

1. sensory training (hearing, touch, etc.);
2. spatial and environmental conceptualization (i.e., understanding the layout of an environment in order to navigate independently);
3. sighted-guide techniques and use of a white cane for independent travel;
4. self-protection techniques; and
5. training the individual's functional travel vision, if appropriate.

An orientation and mobility specialist generally provides the instruction in one-on-one lessons.

**Rehabilitation Teaching.** Rehabilitation teachers provide instruction to adults and children on the skills needed to independently perform daily activities. The teachers provide instruction on various types of activities, such as personal grooming, food preparation, financial management, housekeeping and minor home repair, and braille instruction. The instructors provide services (1) for small groups at community centers for individuals over age 55 or (2) in home on an individual basis.

**Technology.** BESB's adaptive technology lab in Windsor offers adaptive technology devices (e.g., closed caption televisions and computers with speech technology installed) for blind individuals to use at the lab. Information on additional adaptive technology resources around Connecticut is available at <http://www.ct.gov/besb/cwp/view.asp?a=2848&q=480342>.

**Low Vision.** According to BESB, "low vision" means vision loss that cannot be corrected by conventional glasses, contact lenses, medication, or surgery. Low vision services help individuals with low vision to maximize the vision they have. BESB offers low vision services to certain children and adults registered with the bureau, depending on their visual acuity.

### **Child Services**

BESB provides various services to children who are visually impaired, legally blind, or blind and deaf. The bureau provides consultant services in the child's home or school, as well as through special-needs programs. BESB's consultants may provide assistance in various ways, such as:

1. teaching the child Braille and how to use other low vision aids,

2. scheduling functional vision assessments and arranging low vision or other appropriate examinations,
3. evaluating the child's progress and development,
4. teaching the child's parents and caregivers how to work with the child, and
5. providing early intervention services for infants with limited vision.

The law requires DORS, upon a school district's written request, to provide teaching services for a visually impaired student based on the levels established in the student's individualized education or service plan. DORS must also make available resources, including a Braille and large print library, to all public and nonpublic school teachers ([CGS § 10-295\(b\)](#)).

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

Following are examples of other legal benefits for individuals in Connecticut who are blind.

### ***Property Tax Exemption***

A legally blind person is generally eligible for a \$3,000 exemption of the assessed value of the property ([CGS § 12-81\(17\)](#)). If the property is jointly owned with a spouse or is in the spouse's name, the person may still claim the exemption.

Any municipality, with approval from its legislative body, may provide an additional exemption of up to \$2,000 of the property's assessed value, as long as the blind person and his or her spouse, if applicable, meet certain income requirements ([CGS §12-81j](#)).

### ***Reduced Fare***

A legally blind person is also eligible for reduced fare on CTTransit, the Department of Transportation-owned bus service. The individual must show a state-issued reduced fare ID card. More information on CTTransit's Reduced Fare ID Program is available at: <http://www.cttransit.com/SeniorDisabled/ReducedFareIdCard.asp>

### ***Parking Pass***

A legally blind person is also eligible for a parking pass from the Department of Motor Vehicles. To receive the pass, he or she must submit a certificate of legal blindness from DORS or a certified optometrist or ophthalmologist along with the application for the pass ([CGS § 14-253a](#)).

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