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**ALERT !!! ALERT !!! ALERT !!!**

**ATTENTION PARENTS OF BLIND/VI CHILDREN & BVI ADULTS**

***The future of the Commission for the Blind might be at stake***

**Gov. Murphy Has Received Recommendations from his Human and Children Services Transition Advisory Committee that we fear will lead to**

**DISMANTLING THE COMMISSION for the BLIND**

**The Governor has heard from only one side—he has NOT heard from blind/VI people or parents—there were NO blind people or parents of blind kids on the committee!**

**We must speak out to preserve services!**

***Here are the facts:***

* The Governor appointed people to his Human and Children’s Services Transition Advisory Committee. There were NO BLIND PEOPLE or PARENTS OF BLIND CHILDREN on the committee.
* The committee’s report recommends eliminating “fragmentation” and “duplication.” This translates to dismantling the Commission and sending its parts out to other state agencies. This equals fragmentation of services for blind people!
* THE REALITY IS…the Commission provides a single point of entry for blind/VI New Jerseyans from birth through old age, no matter their age when they enter the system.
* This is a blindness-specific agency, with easy-to-find, easy-to-access blindness expertise and services all under one roof.
* Blind/VI people can move seamlessly across service areas for early intervention, school & transition services, college services, preparation for the workforce, independent living, or a combination of these.
* Specialized skills such as Braille and tactile graphics, adaptive technology, cane travel, and independent living skills are taught by Commission professionals trained in these techniques. These services are not offered elsewhere in state government. There is no duplication of services.
* BVI people represent the smallest percentage of the general disability population. When services for the blind are blended in with service to people with all disabilities, the services for the blind get lost. This is supported by research done on separate agencies for the blind vs. general/combined agencies.
* Blind people served by separate agencies are more likely to gain competitive employment at a higher salary vs. those served by general/combined agencies.
* Unintended consequences of dismantling the Commission would lead to fragmentation of services for blind/VI consumers and potential reduction of employment and earnings.
* 9,000-10,000 people receive Commission services every year and would be directly affected if the changes are made. Another 35,000 receive eye-health screenings.
* With the Commission’s single point of entry and comprehensive system of blindness-specific services all under one roof, the blind of New Jersey experience seamless, easy-to-find, easy-to-access, expert service and certainly NOT fragmentation as suggested in the Report of the Human and Children Services Transition Advisory Committee to the Governor. There is no duplication of services. No other agency in state government offers the blindness-specific services the Commission provides.
* The NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired must be preserved as a separate agency.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO**

* Read the Fact Sheet.
* Then Email, write, call, and visit:
  + Your 3 state legislators (State Senator and 2 Members of the Assembly)
  + The chairs of the Human Services committees listed below.
  + Governor Murphy and Department of Human Services Acting Director Carole Johnson
  + The newspapers
* Give/send them our Fact Sheet.
* Tell about the special training you or your child has received from the Commission and what is has meant to your life. Tell the number of other blind people affected.
* Ask our legislators to protect services for our blind kids and for BVI adults. Ask them to

**PRESERVE THE COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED AS A SEPARATE AGENCY**

**Find your legislators** at http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/members/legsearch.asp

**Find the Governor’s** contact info here: http://nj.gov/governor/contact/

**Find Acting Commissioner** Johnson’s mailing address here: http://www.nj.gov/nj/gov/deptserv/

Email: carole.johnson@dhs.state.nj.us

**Format for email to legislators:** State Senator: senLASTNAME@njleg.org

Assemblyman: asmLASTNAME@njleg.org

Assemblywoman: aswLASTNAME@njleg.org

**Senator Joseph F. Vitale**

**Chair, Health, Human Services, and Sr. Citizens Committee** 569 Rahway Ave.

Woodbridge, NJ 07095

732-855-7441

senvitale@njleg.org

**Assemblywoman Joann Downey**

**Chair, Human Services Committee**

802 West Park Ave. or 35 West Main St.

Suite 221  1st Floor   
Ocean Twp., NJ 07712 Freehold, NJ 07728  
732-695-3371 732-333-0166

aswdowney@njleg.org

***Sample message:***

My name is \_\_\_\_ and I am writing to ask you to please preserve critical services for NJ's blind children and adults by keeping the NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired as a separate, blindness-specific agency. The Governor’s Human and Children Services Transition Advisory Committee has made recommendations that I fear will dismantle the Commission for the Blind. Please do not let this happen.

This change, if it is allowed to happen, will have a direct and drastic impact on the 10,000 blind and visually impaired people served by the Commission each year. Blind people are much more successful when they receive services from a separate, blindness-specific agency, rather than one that is combined with other agencies. Please see the Fact Sheet I have provided. [***USE OTHER DETAILS ON FACT SHEET & PREVIOUS PAGE]***

***[BRIEFLY TELL ABOUT YOURSELF or YOUR CHILD,*** *the special services he/she has received from the Commission, and what these services mean to your/your child’s life. Perhaps enclose/insert a photo of your child.]*

My daughter \_\_\_\_ was able to succeed in public school, graduate from college and graduate school, and gain employment because of the special services she received from the Commission for the Blind—especially Braille, access technology, and how to travel with the long white cane. I want every blind person to have the opportunity to receive this training and do not want to see services diminished in any way.  
  
Blind people will directly suffer if the Commission for the Blind is dismantled. There are already too many unemployed blind adults, and staff at other agencies have no idea of what is needed by blind people to become successful, independent, employed adults.

Please make sure that the NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired remains a separate, blindness-specific agency.

Sincerely,

Your Name & Contact Info

For further info, contact **Parents of Blind Children-NJ (POBC-NJ) Founder Carol Castellano**

carol\_castellano@verizon.net or 973-377-0976 or

**National Federation of the Blind of NJ** (NFBNJ) **President** **Joe Ruffalo**

nfbnj1@verizon.net or 973-743-0075

Please let us know if you have written or called and if you receive a response.