Good Afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleishman and Members of the Education Committee

My name is Elizabeth Wiley. I am 14 years old, and a freshman in high school. I am here to speak about the Reach Out and Read program.

Reach Out and Read has 3 components. The first component is doctors giving a new book to each child at their well child "check-ups." The second is doctors giving guidance to parents about sharing books with very young children. I am here today to represent the third component: volunteers.

Volunteers come in all shapes and sizes, but they have two important traits in common: a love of books and stories, and a genuine interest in helping children. Volunteers can be middle school students working to fulfill community service hour requirements or senior citizens reading in waiting rooms. Individuals volunteer, and so do community organizations and businesses. Every doctor and nurse who gives out guidance and books in a pediatric office or clinic is a volunteer. Volunteer duties range from sorting and storing books and checking inventory to fund–raising, but the central responsibility of Reach Out and Read volunteers is reading in the waiting room. This kind of reading is more than just entertainment for the children and is much different than a story hour at the library. Volunteers demonstrate to parents how much fun reading with young children can be and how much young children can already do. Volunteers go through special training to learn about children's development and about important reading strategies to model. One important example is "dialogic reading."

Dialogic reading is a technique where the adult becomes the listener or audience, helping the child to be the story-reader or teller. Dialogic reading does not come naturally to many people, but it is easy to learn by watching someone else. Rather than just listening, children actively participate in reading and discussing the story. For example, they may help finish sentences and answer questions about what is happening in the story or predict what might happen next. Children who are read to dialogically are way ahead of children who are read to traditionally on tests of language development. Even more important, children begin, at an early age, to see themselves as readers.

In one favorite family video, I am 21 months old, lying on the floor, "reading" a book, with a mixture of real and made up sentences, all with lots of expression. It is very clear that I thought I was truly reading. I know now that I only did this at this early age because my parents read to me. I loved books and I couldn't wait to learn to read. I am a Reach Out and Read volunteer because I want to see every child get the right start in learning to read. Thank you.