

**TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT LEGAL SERVICES
FOR THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

**REGARDING RAISED BILL NO. 5421,
AN ACT CONCERNING IN-SERVICE TRAINING IN SCIENTIFICALLY-
BASED READING RESEARCH MODELS
FOR CERTIFIED SCHOOL PERSONNEL**

MARCH 8, 2010

Dear Sen. Gaffey, Rep. Fleischmann, and other distinguished members of the Committee on Education:

My name is Bet Gailor and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Children at Risk Unit of Connecticut Legal Services, Inc. (CLS). For over thirty years, the Children at Risk Unit at CLS has represented low-income families to assist them in accessing appropriate educational services for their children, many of whom have disabilities. I am also a member of We Will Read, a group of over twenty professionals and parents who have been committed to increasing the quality of teacher preparation in the area of reading for the past two and a half years.

Connecticut Legal Services supports Raised Bill No. 5421, which requires school districts to include scientifically-based reading research models as described by the No Child left Behind Act (NCLB), P. L. 107-110, as part of the in-service training it provides for teachers in grades kindergarten to three.

Connecticut's 2009 State Report Card, prepared by the Connecticut Department of Education in compliance with NCLB, reflects the crisis in reading instruction in our public schools. Overall, on the 2009 Connecticut Mastery Test, only 74% of students scored at or above proficient level in reading; only 52% of Black, only 48% Hispanic, and only 28% of students with disabilities scored at or above proficient level. Similarly, on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test for 2009, the data for our high school students is just as bleak: only 78% of students overall scored at proficient level in reading, compared with 56% of Black and Hispanic students and 35% of students with disabilities.

Many of CLS' clients over the past twenty years have been students of average intelligence who are struggling readers. These students have reached middle and high school reading well below grade level. In fact, it is not uncommon to find high school students with first or second grade reading skills, regardless of whether or not they were identified as eligible for special education and even though their difficulties learning to read were identified in first grade.

The sad truth reflected by Connecticut's performance data and the children and



families who have sought legal representation from CLS is that a majority of our educators has not been trained in the science of teaching reading. CLS' representation of struggling readers has taught us that the training of the reading teacher is a key variable in the success of the student. Many of our clients came to CLS as dejected high school students reading at a first or second grade level. When these students were finally able to be taught by reading teachers who were trained in the science of reading, these students made remarkable progress, gaining up to five grade levels in reading skills in a single academic year. The only difference in their lives was their access to a teacher who knew how to teach explicit and differentiated code instruction, instruction based on the thirty years of research that was incorporated into NCLB and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Raised Bill 5421, which requires in-service training to all K-3 teachers in the science of reading, will be critical to the success of all Connecticut's students. For this reason, Connecticut Legal Services strongly urges the Committee on Education to support HB 5421. Please feel free to contact Attorney Bet Gailor at 860 456-1761, ext. 111, with any questions regarding this testimony.