

Subject: Raised House Bill 6501 – Testimony

Dear Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Laurie Bloom. I have been a resident of Connecticut for over 30 years and I offer this testimony today in support of House Bill 6501 as both a parent of an adult child with a reading disability and as a member of the Legislative Advocacy Committee of CACLD (Connecticut Association for Children & Adults with Learning Disabilities). I wholeheartedly support the intention of 6501 to prevent delays in the evaluation of children to determine eligibility for special education services. However, the bill, as written, fails to address the role of Connecticut's Response to Intervention through the multi-tiered SRBI program set forth in the 2010 Guidelines for Identifying a Child with a Specific Learning Disability.

If schools are allowed to continue to hide behind SRBI as an excuse for delay in determining eligibility for and implementing appropriate special education services, they are acting in violation of IDEA to provide a free and appropriate education. Response to intervention becomes a catch-phrase for "response to failure" which was the standard operating procedure when my son entered elementary school almost 20 years ago. I believe it was Ben Franklin who famously said "Time lost cannot be found." This is never more true than for struggling young readers, where early and appropriate reading instruction lays the foundation for all other learning, and ultimately for their future success beyond primary and secondary education.

As a parent, I began my special education journey more than 20 years ago, when my son was still in pre-school. Notwithstanding that he had his first IEP when he was three years old, he continued to fall further and further behind his peers each year. By the end of third grade, my nine year old was barely reading on a first grade level, couldn't spell and still had trouble printing letters, although diagnostic testing indicated he had the vocabulary of a 20 year old. We placed my son in a private special education school and brought a due process action against the school district. After 12 days of hearings, over a period of 14 months, the hearing officer ordered the school district to pay for the placement and transportation. Because they had failed to provide appropriate special education services at a critical stage of learning, my son still faced huge obstacles in order to compensate for his dyslexia, catch up, and ultimately succeed. My son continued in private special education school placements **at the expense of my local school district for ten years** (including extended school year for at least six years), due in large part to the delays in receiving appropriate special education services at an early

age. At the age of 19, my son graduated from high school with two diplomas, one from his special education high school and one granted by Weston High School (although he was not a student there, he had satisfied the Weston graduation requirements at his private placement). Four years later, in May 2010, my son graduated from college, *cum laude*, with a bachelor of sciences degree, ranked number one in his department. This does not mean that he was no longer dyslexic, or that any of this came easily. On the contrary, my son always had to work harder than his peers or his siblings to find his success. Even after he exited the protection of the IDEA, he still required accommodations for his learning differences in order to succeed in college. My son has become a skilled self-advocate which was the key to his success in post-secondary education and will allow him to continue to achieve and exceed all expectations as a lifelong learner, even though he happens to be dyslexic.

While my son's story has a happy ending (it must be noted it did not come without years of frustration for him and his parents), it has also come at a great financial cost to our local school district and taxpayers. This scenario can be avoided in the future by ensuring that all students suspected (by their parents or teachers) of requiring special education services receive prompt evaluations and are then properly identified; other children will not have to endure the long term challenges that my son faced due to years of delay based on a response to failure model. It is important that this bill be amended to reflect Connecticut's Response to Intervention program and not allow RTI to be a cause or excuse to delay or deny evaluations and appropriate services to children with learning disabilities. I urge you to support Raised Bill 6501 with the aforementioned amendment included.

Sincerely yours,

Laurie Bloom, Esq.

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CACLD member /Legislative Advocacy Committee

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