

March 14, 2014

Education Committee Members:

My name is Allison Quirion, I am the parent of a 10 year old dyslexic son, Jack. I am the Founder of Decoding Dyslexia-CT a grassroots movement concerned with the limited identification and interventions for dyslexic students within our Connecticut public schools. I am in support of HRB 5562, Section 1, An Act Concerning Special Education and respectfully request that you revise this Section by adding language for professional development and a definition of dyslexia.

My experience with identifying my son Jack with dyslexia is equivalent to presenting myself at the Emergency Room with acute signs of a heart attack and being told to come back in a couple of days when it gets really bad! Due to the delay in identifying my son, he entered 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading below a first grade level; 3 years behind his peers!

Currently, Connecticut does not have a **definition of dyslexia**. A universal definition and understanding of dyslexia should be in the State Education Code as it will facilitate communication and lead to a more rapid provision of interventions. A precise definition with clear inclusionary and exclusionary characteristics minimizes the amount of time and cost of assessments. I attach a definition suggested by Dr. Sally Shaywitz, from the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity and the definition from The National Institute of Health definition. Dr. Shaywitz's suggested definition has been incorporated into House Resolution 456 introduced in Washington in January 2014. House Resolution 456 submitted by Congressman Cassidy, calls for States to recognize that dyslexia has significant educational implications that must be addressed. Connecticut needs to address these issues.

In 1975, Congress included dyslexia as a qualifying condition under the Special Education eligibility category of "Specific Learning Disability" (SLD). A **change to the IEP form to add a box "SLD/Dyslexia"** would provide data as to the number of students in Connecticut being referred to special education for dyslexia as compared to statistical data. Approximately 80% of people with learning disabilities have dyslexia, which makes it the most common learning disability. Shaywitz SE. Dyslexia. N Engl J Med. 1998;338(5):307-312. It would also provoke a discussion with the PPT team as to appropriate interventions for a student with dyslexia and collect data to be compared to national statistics.

Early identification of dyslexia is NOT taking place in many of our Connecticut public schools. Experts in the field state, it is now possible to identify children at risk for word-reading difficulties as early as kindergarten. <http://visionhelp.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/dyslexia-shaywitz-swipe-at-vt>

jaapos-03 **Early assessments** will lead to early identification, which is key to a dyslexic student's success. Without early identification our bright, creative, social and caring children are feeling lazy, dumb, anxious and stupid.

Teachers need to be provided with **professional development** with proven and effective measures so they can identify and support our dyslexic students. If our teachers lack the resources and knowledge surrounding dyslexia, our children will continue to be unidentified and passed through the system.

Connecticut needs to join the other 26 states that have pending or current legislation to protect and support dyslexic students and teachers. The research, science and evidence is there, it is not being transferred to Connecticut's classrooms. **States that have Dyslexia laws or Dyslexia bills pending:** (as of 2/27/14): AK, CA, CO, HI, IA, IL, KS, KY, LA, MA, MN, MO, MS, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, TN, TX, UT, WV, WY

*"In medicine, if research found new ways to save lives, health care professionals would adopt these methods as quickly as possible, and would change practices, procedures and systems. Educational research has found new ways to save young minds by helping them to become proficient readers; it is up to us to promote these new methods throughout the education system. Young lives depend on it."*

-Louisa C. Moats, Ed.D.

You would not want to wait days to be treated for a heart attack. Nor should our dyslexic children wait years to be identified.

Thank you for your time and your commitment.

Allison Quirion  
Hebron, CT

## **Suggested definition of dyslexia:**

**Dr. Sally Shaywitz**

**Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity**

Defined is an unexpected difficulty in reading in an individual who has the intelligence to be a much better reader, dyslexia reflects a difficulty in getting to the individual sounds of spoken language which typically impacts speaking (word retrieval), reading (accuracy and fluency), spelling, and often, learning a second language. Dyslexia is highly prevalent, affecting one out of five, and is persistent. Great progress has been made in understanding dyslexia at a scientific level, including its epidemiology, cognitive and neurobiological bases. Though neurobiologically-based, dyslexia has a major educational impact. Dyslexia is a paradox, so that often the same individual who has a weakness in decoding or reading fluency also has strengths in higher level cognitive functions such as reasoning, critical thinking, concept formation and problem solving. Diagnosis of dyslexia is critical, leading to focused, evidence-based interventions, necessary accommodations, self-awareness, self-empowerment, and school and life success. As a result, it is possible for the strengths rather than the weakness to predominate and represent that individual's life.

## **National Institute of Health defines dyslexia:**

*Dyslexia is a brain-based type of learning disability that specifically impairs a person's ability to read. These individuals typically read at levels significantly lower than expected despite having normal intelligence. Although the disorder varies from person to person, common characteristics among people with dyslexia are difficulty with phonological processing (the manipulation of sounds), spelling, and/or rapid visual-verbal responding. In individuals with adult onset of dyslexia, it usually occurs as a result of brain injury or in the context of dementia; this contrasts with individuals with dyslexia who simply were never identified as children or adolescents. Dyslexia can be inherited in some families, and recent studies have identified a number of genes that may predispose an individual to developing dyslexia.*

113<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS

2<sup>D</sup> SESSION **H. RES. 456**

Calling on schools and State and local educational agencies to recognize that dyslexia has significant educational implications that must be addressed.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 10, 2014

Mr. CASSIDY (for himself and Ms. BROWNLEY of California) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce

**RESOLUTION**

Calling on schools and State and local educational agencies to recognize that dyslexia has significant educational implications that must be addressed.

Whereas, defined as an unexpected difficulty in reading in an individual who has the intelligence to be a much better reader, dyslexia reflects a difficulty in getting to the individual sounds of spoken language which typically impacts speaking, reading, spelling, and often, learning a second language;

Whereas dyslexia is highly prevalent, affecting one out of five individuals in some form, and is persistent;

Whereas dyslexia is a paradox, so that often the same individual who has a weakness in decoding or reading fluency also has strengths in higher level cognitive functions such as reasoning, critical thinking, concept formation, and problem solving;

Whereas great progress has been made in understanding dyslexia at a scientific level, including its epidemiology, and cognitive and neurobiological bases; and

Whereas diagnosis of dyslexia is critical, and must lead to focused, evidence-based interventions, necessary accommodations, self-awareness, self-empowerment, and school and life success: Now, therefore, be it

1 Resolved, That the House of Representatives calls on schools and State and local educational agencies to recognize that dyslexia has significant educational implications that must be addressed.