

**Raised House Bill No. 5562, An Act Concerning Special Education.**

Representative Fleischmann, Representative Stillman, Senator Linares, and members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Raised House Bill No. 5562, **An Act Concerning Special Education.**

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this bill. When people ask me when my daughter began struggling in school I tell them “almost from the first day she got there.” That was almost 10 years ago.

In Kindergarten I was told that she was having problems learning her Alphabet but that everything would be fine. In First grade, the problems seemed to grow. She was not learning how to read, she was becoming anxious and I was asked if I was reading to her every day. I was. By Second grade she was far enough behind to qualify for services. I was told by the Special Education teacher that my daughter was impulsive because she guessed at answers she did not know. Wouldn't you? The recommendation was to qualify her under OHI and begin Reading Recovery, smaller group, but same type of instruction. There was some testing ordered, but testing did not include a Comprehensive Reading Assessment, even though her main difficulty had been in reading. By this time she developed intense anxiety due to her being made to feel that she should be able to learn to read and that she must be stupid.

By the beginning of Third Grade, my daughter was even further behind in reading and the Wilson Reading program was begun and carried out by the Special Education teacher. I was assured that she was making progress; however, I was not seeing any and growing even more concerned she was beginning to test out as developing depression. I had to drive her to school every day because she became too anxious to take the bus. There was never a reading specialist on my IEP team until I requested that a consultant reading specialist be obtained. I routinely asked if she might have Dyslexia since she suffered from repetitive ear infections from an early age and there was a familial tendency to it. This was never fully considered by the team. In September of my daughter's Fourth grade year, I decided to bring her for an out of state Comprehensive Reading Evaluation and learned at that time that she was reading at no more than a First grade- mid-year level. By this time I had spent thousands of dollars and many, many hours attempting to research why my daughter had not been able to learn to read. I had hired two different advocates and begun due process multiple times.

Eventually, the well meaning staff at her school came to understand what needed to be done and not only were they willing to provide the type of reading instruction necessary in order for Dyslexics to learn to read, they were willing to let individuals trained in the approach provide this instruction for my daughter at the school so that they could learn more about what it

entailed. Many, many staff from our school has obtained training and professional development in an effort to better understand how to recognize and teach these children. It took 8 weeks of 4 hours per week of the correct reading instruction for my daughter to begin Fifth Grade reading at an early Fifth Grade level (4 years gain in 8 short weeks of the 'right thing'). It took another two years until she was exited out and is currently eligible for accommodations. We still routinely encounter teachers who question the need for the accommodations that level the playing field and allow my daughter the opportunity to perform to her fullest. In a month or so, I will be required to pay another thousand dollars or so to obtain *another* evaluation to prove that my daughter still has Dyslexia (it will NEVER fully go away) so that she can be afforded these accommodations on her SAT's.

Dyslexia **IS** real, but mostly all educators refuse to recognize it. There is an antiquated misconception that Dyslexia means "unable to learn". That's what I thought until I researched it. This could NOT be farther from the truth! Current research tells us that these individuals are EXTREMELY able-minded, creative, hard-working and out of the box thinkers that absolutely CAN LEARN. My daughter is proof. She is currently a tenth grader at a local Catholic high school and holds a 3.5 GPA. It saddens me to think that all over this state and all over this country, Dyslexic children go through this torture day after day in our public school systems. Because educators are not trained in recognizing the signs of Dyslexia and providing meaningful remediation, our children's rights are being denied under the Child Find Law, a law that was intended to evaluate and identify ALL at risk children for disabilities, including Learning Disabilities that must include an evaluation for Dyslexia. Much too often the individuals who are sitting at the PPT table do not have sufficient expertise to make meaningful recommendations for evaluation or for IEP goals and objectives, nor do they recognize their obligation under this law to provide a comprehensive reading evaluation whenever there is a child who is struggling with reading.

I will never know the true extent of the scars from having gone through such trauma at such a young age and how those experiences might have changed her, but I know that my daughter will never be the person that she was meant to be before all of this began. Luckily she has Dyslexia and because of it she has found a way around just about every obstacle that has been put in front of her and continues to do so.

The neglect of these individuals has gone on far too long. I support any legislation that clarifies the definition of Dyslexia, educates the parties responsible for identifying them and arms them with all of the expertise needed to educate and appreciate our young Dyslexic school children.

I support Raised House Bill No. 5562, **An Act Concerning Special Education** and I hope that you will too.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Bankoski