

RHB 5562, Section 1, An Act Concerning Special Education Testimony

From Jessica Glassman

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I am speaking in support of Bill RHB 5562, An Act Concerning Special Education. I am requesting changes/additions to be made to this bill to include early screening and identification of dyslexia, a check box on the IEP form for dyslexia and professional development for teachers about dyslexia. I am an educator and parent of a dyslexic son. I live in Orange, Connecticut. That district has a good reputation for educating students, but as a parent of a child with learning challenges, I am very disappointed with my child's individualized education. It is very important that dyslexia be recognized in the State of Connecticut. Without the proper interventions and teacher training, my son's story will join the others past and future of lost opportunity. Dyslexia needs to be recognized as a disability on its own, not just lumped with every other learning disability. Yale has done extensive research and has proven, using MRI brain scans, that a dyslexic child's brain can be changed with the proper interventions, yet this research is not being used to help our students. Orton Gillingham is one of the most effective techniques to use with dyslexic children, yet most schools don't have certified instructors. Schools need to be held accountable and teach students to their individual potential. Our bright, creative children deserve the same educational opportunities as their non-dyslexic peers.

I noticed that my son had reading difficulties in kindergarten. He entered school with all of his basic skills. There were warning signs when he was younger, but Birth to Three told me that my child might not be talking but he was too smart to qualify for services. My son did speak late, yet wound up with an excellent vocabulary. However, when it was time to decode words in kindergarten, he hit a wall. It has been a long, hard and lonely road to get the school to understand my son's unique needs and get them to provide a free and appropriate education. The school placed my son in some reading intervention groups but kept telling me that he just needed more time. Time passed by and my son continued to struggle. Later in kindergarten, I brought my son for an outside evaluation from a neuropsychologist. She diagnosed him with a reading disability. She stated that he demonstrated dyslexic tendencies, but was too young to diagnose him with a specific learning disability. At the end of third grade, when we returned to the neuropsychologist, she diagnosed my son with dyslexia. If my son had been given the proper interventions when first presented to the school in kindergarten, we wouldn't be where we are today. My son still struggles and the gap just keeps growing between my son's reading achievement and his peers'. Research shows if a child doesn't catch up by 3rd grade, his chances of ever catching up to his peers decline significantly. My son currently reads about 65 words per minute, the typical fourth grader reads about 120 words

per minute by the middle of the school year. My son can independently decode a second grade chapter book. He is always put in the lowest reading group in his class, yet when he uses an iPad to listen to chapter books, he can comprehend 5th grade level text and beyond. My son, along with most dyslexic kids, can read much better with his ears than his eyes. Even though we would never tell a blind person they are not reading, when they read Braille with their finger, many teachers have told my son that he is not reading when he reads with his ears. Teachers insist that he read paper books, even though his IEP states he should have access to grade level text with a digital reader. His classroom teacher refuses to put him in the higher reading group. With the support of technology, my son is able to produce work way above the level he achieves when left to his own devices. It is not understood by most educators that dyslexic children have average to above average IQs, so they are capable of so much more if given the correct instruction and accommodations in class.

Dyslexic students need to be identified early and given early scientifically researched based interventions, like Orton Gillingham instruction, when deficiencies are first noticed. If this had been done for my son, he would not be struggling in 4th grade to read and spell on grade level. Dyslexia also needs its own check box on the IEP forms and to have a proper definition based on the current scientific research. If dyslexia were defined, teachers would have a basis for proper identification. A separate check box on the IEP forms would help separate our dyslexic students with distinct needs from all the other students lumped into the current category of Learning Disabled. Currently, many students with vast needs are being accepted into special education under the label of Learning Disabled. My son is being grouped with a wide variety of students who have very different needs than he has. Defining dyslexia and giving a separate check box would help distinguish our children from others who require different interventions. Teacher training on dyslexia is also a key part of giving our children proper interventions. Currently teachers know little to nothing about dyslexia. Classroom and special education teachers are not taught about dyslexia in their teacher prep programs and schools don't typically give professional development on dyslexia. Unless a teacher has sought information on their own, they don't truly understand their dyslexic students. It is very important that teachers understand that our bright dyslexic children aren't "lazy" or "not trying". My son tries his best and is sometimes unable to show what he knows because of his disability. If teachers understood how my child and other dyslexic children learn, our children would make the progress they need to keep up with their non-dyslexic peers. The State of Connecticut needs to catch up with current research. Dyslexia needs to be recognized, remediated early and teachers need to be given the proper training. I ask that you help by supporting and passing Bill RHB 5562, An Act concerning Special Education.

