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**Testimony re. RHB 5562, Section 1, An Act Concerning Special Education**

Co-Chairs Rep. Fleischman and Senator Stillman and members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to testify today. I am here to support HRB 5562 Section 1, with modifications to include a definition of dyslexia to support an understanding and professional development specific to dyslexia awareness. I am pleased to be with you to consider the urgency for change regarding the issue of dyslexia in Connecticut Public Schools. My name is Marc Hoffman, and I am the owner of Hoffman Education and Marc Hoffman Educational Consulting. I serve as Board Chair of Eye to Eye, the only national mentoring movement that pairs kids who have learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (LD / ADHD) with college and high school mentors who have been similarly labeled. I'm a Learning Disability Advocate and dyslexic. My experiences with dyslexia have led me to the work I do today. I wake up every day with the goal of helping ensure that all children receive an appropriate education.

There's a crisis in American Schools. Research shows that only around 33% of children in school with reading disabilities are getting remediation to help them become, at the very least, functional readers. While the occurrence of dyslexia in the overall population is about 20%, the prevalence of dyslexia in prisons is more than twice that, or 48% according to a scientific study that took place in 2000. Many of these incarcerated men are great entrepreneurs but they are starting the wrong kind of businesses.

We are fortunate to have leaders in our state who appreciate both the urgency for change and the magnitude of the change that must occur to help dyslexic students. Parents, Advocates, Students, Teachers and Educators continue to champion the need for dyslexia awareness. The current provision in the proposed bill providing a box on the IEP form for "SLD-Dyslexia" is a step in the right direction but not enough. Unfortunately, there are too many children not being identified as dyslexic in schools, and the current proposed bill only helps those students already evaluated and in the process of being referred to special education services. The paramount need is that the legislation addresses the lack of awareness on the part of some schools. Many misperceptions exist such as Dyslexia being a site issue when in reality it interferes with the acquisition and processing of language. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition, and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These problems normally result from a deficit in the phonological component of language.

The dyslexia movement's interest is not to label children but to ensure that all educators have at least a basic understanding of dyslexia. For starters, this is required on the part of teachers because they are the ones directly dealing with children and they need to know

the characteristics, symptoms, of dyslexia. Empirical evidence demonstrates that dyslexia is a physiological reality and not simply developmental. The treatment approach used in some CT schools is not addressing the phonemic awareness issue.

Even though dyslexia is a disability that is recognized and is covered under provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, I still see too many children dealing with educational trauma because they are misunderstood. In many cases they are not given the resources to remediate their challenges with reading. By definition, to be dyslexic, you have to have at least average intelligence. With that in mind, many children with dyslexia are brilliant but being marginalized and not given the chance to reach their potential. We are losing the next Steven Spielberg, Charles Schwab, Will Smith and even the next Albert Einstein, all Dyslexics, because no matter how smart they are, in many cases, when children constantly experience academic failure because their learning environment does not understand their cognitive profiles, they stop trying. Society needs people that think differently and tackle problems in a creative way, characteristics of many dyslexics.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to speak with you. I welcome any questions or comments that you may have.

Respectfully,

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