

I am writing to support making changes to **House Bill # 5562**, an act concerning special education. I specifically support legislation regarding Dyslexia. As a speech pathologist in an elementary school setting, I am very familiar with IEP's and how a student is identified. I realize that the bill will lead to a change in the IEP paperwork and the options a school system would be given when identifying a child with special needs. While a box that will allow a student to be identified with dyslexia is helpful, without the professional development needed and the definition of the disability available to those who identify the disability, a checked box does no more for the student than a checked box saying Specific Learning Disability. As a parent of an 8 year boy who suffers from the trials and tribulations caused by dyslexia I am even more aware of the need for more information on the disability and for schools to have the available resources to identify students impacted by this at an early age.

My son is currently a third grade student who has grown to dislike school. To him, it is a place that is full of fear and frustration. It is a place where he feels inadequate and alone. He is a bright boy, with an above average IQ. He is creative and loves to come up with new inventions. He is sensitive and loves helping people. He is also very impaired in reading and writing. In kindergarten, first, and most of second grade, he fell through the cracks. At teacher conferences we were always told he is a hard worker, does well in math, participates, problem solves, and loves listening to stories. He struggles with decoding words and spelling. His writing is illegible at times and he can't seem to apply skills taught. He needs to try harder and practice more. Each teacher would work with him when time permitted and we did what we could at home. Improvements weren't noted. Each year, he fell further and further below grade level in language arts. Teachers weren't exactly sure why he wasn't picking it up because he tried hard. He seemed to pick other things up. With a high number of students in a class and limited help, there wasn't always the opportunity to give him extra support or small group guidance. He wasn't special education so he didn't qualify for the extra support. Night after night he struggled with homework and while he held his emotions together at school he would come home angry and frustrated. "Why can't I do what everyone else does? Why I am so stupid? I will never get this?" Holding back tears myself, watching him breakdown I promised him I would do what I could to help him. I knew my rights as a parent to request testing, so I did just that. My husband and I called a PPT and asked for a complete evaluation to be done. It was completed and he was found to have a significant reading disability. A 44 point difference existed between his IQ and reading skills, and a 23 point difference between his high average perceptual reasoning and low average working memory. Phonological awareness was low average. He met criteria for a reading disability. Could it be dyslexia? It very well could be but we were told by the school that it is not a diagnosis they can give. We contacted outside places to get information but with an average rate of \$1700 per evaluation, it would be difficult for us to afford. The schools should have more information on this, especially since early intervention is key to success.

While my son has a solid special education program in place now and has improved in reading, he is still below grade level. What is so unfortunate is that he doesn't see his progress. What he sees is a kid who can't read like his friends, a kid who misspells everything and is "always wrong when he tries to write things". It is heart breaking to see him slowly becoming more introverted, less sure of himself, and more anxious. In essence those first 3 years of school he began to see himself not as the smart kid he once thought he was but as the kid who tries and fails, the kid who year after year falls below average, **the kid who can't read**. He is in counseling weekly now and we have many strategies in place to build his self- esteem and I am hopeful they will work. **What would have happened if we didn't push for him to be tested? How long would we have waited? How far would he have gone without help? Why don't schools have more information on Dyslexia?** It is imperative that we provide our schools and our teachers with the training and the resources that will allow them to identify these children early on and to help them in those years when they are learning who they are, when they are molding their self- image. **They can learn, they can read. They need help and they need it now.** Please help us to ensure the success of ALL our children. Help us to give these children faith, faith in themselves and in an education system that won't let anyone else fall through the cracks.

Thank You,

Camille Bray