Statement in Support of RHB 5562, Section 1, An Act Concerning Special Education
To: Senator Andrea L. Stillman
Representative Andrew M. Fleischmann

Approximately 50 years ago, I taught special education in a self-contained classroom with only eight students, a half-time aide, and with a good physical environment—all factors conducive to success. I loved those children, but I failed to teach them to read, because I did not know how. I was so discouraged that I left teaching.

Approximately 25 years later, I learned the Orton-Gilllingham approach to teaching reading, and I have been successfully teaching dyslexic students to read since then.

At that time, few curriculum materials were available, so I created my own lesson plans. I still do, but this is very labor intensive and would be very demanding on a classroom teacher's time. However, in the intervening time, several curriculum programs have been developed that are scientifically research-based, and use the principles that are endorsed by the Orton-Gilllingham approach. They are designed to be used in a whole class or in small group settings, and they provide training and lesson plans for teachers. Some examples include Wilson Fundations, Lindamood-Bell Phoneme Sequencing (LiPS), and Project Read. There are others, but these are ones that I am familiar with and use. The important considerations in choosing a curriculum for dyslexic students is that it be scientifically research-based, and that it follow Orton-Gillingham principles.

To illustrate the effectiveness of this approach, I have two examples to share. The first is a child, whose father and grandfather were both dyslexic. I worked with him beginning in kindergarten and by third grade, his teacher wondered why I was helping him because he was doing as well as the other children. He never needed to enter special education classes. The second example was a third grader whose parents were told by school staff that he would never learn to read. By seventh grade he was reading in the low-average range.

These are two dramatic examples, but my experience teaching reading to many other students who struggled with conventional classroom instruction confirms that dyslexic students can learn to read, given appropriate instruction.

I am glad that the state education committee is finally addressing the topic of dyslexic students. However, to have them identified on the IEP form is just the beginning. Please amend this bill to require that they be taught using appropriate instructional methods by teachers who are trained to use the materials.

Please pass and amend this bill No 5562, An Act Concerning Special Education, so these students, approximately 10%-20% of the school population, can be identified and taught with effective methods. To ignore their needs is to discriminate against these children. To teach them effectively may even reduce the number of students who require special education services or the extent of the services, thereby reducing the financial demand on the school district.

Thank you.

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