

March 13, 2014

Subject: Testimony HRB No.5562

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a written testimony to your committee. My name is Joanne Colwick. I am a retired CT public school special education teacher, and am currently working with students as a private educational therapist. I reside in Lebanon, CT. I am writing in support of Raised House Bill No. 5526. I am writing in support of this bill, but am requesting that you consider modifications to this bill. Identifying a student as having dyslexia on the IEP is important IF it leads to evidence based instruction. This bill benefits a student whose parents, in all likelihood, paid for an independent educational evaluation to obtain the diagnosis of dyslexia. It is important that public school teachers and support staff receive appropriate professional development to identify the early signs of dyslexia and begin evidence based instruction at an early age.

Most of my career has been dedicated to teaching students with learning disabilities within the public school system. The majority of these students experienced difficulties in the area of reading, and were in grades six through eight. I was able to instruct them in a small group setting in the resource room. Despite my best efforts and the use of various instructional approaches, the students were not making the progress required to close the achievement gap between their reading level and grade placement. They were falling further behind their peers.

About sixteen years ago, I was introduced to the term “dyslexia,” and became trained in an evidence based intervention approach proven to be successful with dyslexic students. I now had the knowledge and techniques necessary to teach my students the basics of the alphabetic principle needed to become a skilled reader.

The difficulty I experienced with implementing the evidence based instruction with my students was that they had many years of frustration and failure before entering middle school. Many of them experienced low self esteem due to their dyslexia. Some of the students exhibited inappropriate behaviors as a way to avoid reading. Some students became anxious or depressed. Some just gave up altogether on the possibility of becoming a skilled reader. School can be a stressful and painful place for a dyslexic child.

This committee has the opportunity to change the lives of dyslexic children in Connecticut. Research shows that students at risk for dyslexia can be identified as early as Kindergarten. Early diagnosis and implementation of evidence based interventions need to be initiated early in the child’s school career. Early intervention is the key to success for a dyslexic child. Teachers need to be able to recognize the early signs of dyslexia, and support specialists in public schools need training in diagnosing dyslexia. I urge you to consider modifying this bill to include professional development in the area of dyslexia.

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