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March 13, 2014

Testimony for:
Public Hearing, CT State Capitol in Hartford
Monday, March 17, 2014, 11 a.m.
Legislation to recognize Dyslexia

I am unable to attend the public hearing in person on March 17, 2014 in Support of Bill No. HRB5562 for modifications to include a definition of dyslexia and professional development in CT State Education. Therefore, I am submitting my personal testimony here.

I have four children – two are dyslexic. My oldest child is now 20 years old and we never knew he was dyslexic until he was 16 years old. He was given the incorrect, very broad label of “central auditory processing disorder” and never received the proper instruction or intervention for his dyslexia. My son had to navigate school on his own, constantly criticized by teachers as “not trying hard enough” while in reality, he was working twice as hard as his peers to do the same work. His IQ is in the Superior range, yet he maintained a “C” average all through school. He graduated high school HATING school and is now on his third college, still struggling through, trying to earn his Bachelor’s degree.

Early intervention and diagnosis would have been KEY to my son receiving the proper instruction with teachers trained in teaching dyslexic children. His attitude would have been much different if he had known early on that the reason he was struggling was because he is dyslexic and his brain works differently – and not that he is stupid, which he believed for many, many years. There needs to be early diagnosis of dyslexic children – which accounts for 15 to 20% of all students in school today – and trained teachers in every public school that understand dyslexia and can help provide the proper instruction for them to thrive. How can 15 to 20% of the children in our state continue to be ignored??

My youngest child is also dyslexic, quite severe, along with many other learning disabilities. It was through her that we discovered that our son was dyslexic. NO TEACHER OR SPECIAL EDUCATOR EVER TOLD US OUR SON OR DAUGHTER ARE DYSLEXIC. We had to figure it out for ourselves, with outside testing and refusing to just accept the words “don’t worry, we are handling it.” It is also interesting to note that I currently have 36 hours of training in Orton-Gillingham instruction (one of the best methods to help children with dyslexia to read and learn) – MORE than all the special education teachers in all the public schools my children have attended. These teachers claim to be OG trained, but when I asked, they have only attended a

Saturday workshop for 4-5 hours of training. That is not enough instruction to be considered “trained” in the OG Method, or any other.

My two children have endured more than any child should have to in order to learn. The State of Connecticut needs to rise to the forefront and start educating and supporting the children with the LEADING LEARNING DISABILITY in the country – DYSLEXIA – instead of pretending like it doesn’t exist. I have actually been told by special education directors that they do not use the term “Dyslexia” anymore – and they will only use “reading disability”. I have had public school teachers in our state tell me “oh, I didn’t know your son was dyslexic. Does he really see all his words backwards?” That is a very old, outdated and uneducated myth about dyslexic individuals. How frightening that our State educators are so uninformed. How absolutely wrong for special education directors to say they don’t BELIEVE in dyslexia – when it is medically proven and supported by one of the best Universities in our country – The Yale Center for Dyslexia.

CT State teachers need to be trained specifically about dyslexia and receive professional development in order to properly teach their students with dyslexia. The only way for this to happen is through a State Code that defines dyslexia.

There needs to be a Primary/Disability Box on the IEP that classifies “Dyslexia” so it is clear and understood as to what the learning disability is exactly. Early Screening is absolutely vital. Children should be diagnosed in Kindergarten and given immediate intervention and instruction to help them compensate for their dyslexia. Parents should immediately be made aware that their child is dyslexic.

It is no longer appropriate for dyslexia to continue to be considered a “dirty word” and one that public schools don’t “subscribe to.” Dyslexic children are some of the very brightest and most creative people you will ever meet – and this is proven by the great number of dyslexic individuals who have shaped our country.

Please support the dyslexic children in our state. Now is the time. I applaud you for holding this public hearing and taking an interest. Now take the next step and SUPPORT Bill No. HRB5562. You will save the lives of desperate children and their families who are only asking for a level playing field and the opportunity afforded to every child – the ability to LEARN.

Thank you,

Karen Grazia
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