Dear Sir/Madam

This letter is in support of the "Proposed bill "HRB No5562." I am also proposing that changes in the bill be made that reflects the need for public schools to be able to identify and instruct students with dyslexia. Too, I believe student IEPs need to include a diagnosis of dyslexia. I am currently the Director of the Literacy Program in the School of Education at the University of Bridgeport. Before that I spent 44 years teaching in public school systems in New York City, Ontario, Canada and Greenwich Connecticut as a regular education teacher, literacy specialist, and special education teacher. Also, I have been a member of the International Dyslexia Society for 33 years. During this time, I have worked with hundreds of students I considered to be dyslexic even if they were not officially diagnosed as such. Although their needs may be similar to the needs of students with other learning disabilities and "garden variety" struggling readers, the extent of their struggle to learn to read and write is often significantly greater. I have learned that for many children in the dyslexic population, it can take several years of intensive instruction before they can approach the level of literacy of their normally developing peers. In order for teachers to assist them in learning to read and write, these students need to be identified as dyslexic as early as possible. The earlier we can identify these students, the sooner we can begin to provide the necessary instruction they require, and the easier it will be for them to learn the skills that pose the most challenge for them. The good news is that we have the knowledge necessary for both early identification, and appropriate instruction for these students. Unfortunately, not all schools in Connecticut are identifying these students, much less teaching them reading and writing using methodologies that are known to be successful. (See Connecticut's "Blueprint for Literacy" and the report of the "National Reading Panel.").

I assessed the oral reading of a second grade student in a public school system in Connecticut this past December. His parents were concerned with his reading achievement and were losing confidence in the ability of his teachers to help him. Prior to administering the assessment, I ascertained that "Daniel" was at least of average intelligence (by talking with him about his favorite hobbies and sports, and by viewing a very elaborate space station that he had built from Legos). When I analyzed the word reading errors he made while reading aloud from a self -selected text about snakes that he characterized as "easy," I concluded that they were almost all real word "guesses" that had little relationship to the letters in the printed word (i.e. insects for enemies, drawings for dangerous, house for home, harm for hurt, etc.). I followed up the text reading by having him read lists of words that followed the regular and common letter patterns of English. He read these one syllable words with accuracy that ranged from 35-73%, and he read two syllable words composed of these regular and common patterns with 5% accuracy. Daniel was in the middle of grade two and he could read only one of twenty, two syllable words correctly. When he was asked to spell one syllable words (with short vowel sounds and single consonants), he got 70% correct, and when he was asked to spell one syllable words with consonant blends he got 60% correct. Clearly, Daniel was struggling with word

identification and spelling to such a degree that I am very comfortable characterizing him as a dyslexic student. (His father told me that he too struggled with learning to read. It is common for people with dyslexia to have close relatives who are also dyslexic.) When his parents and myself met with his teachers in the middle of January, we were greatly disappointed. Although Daniel had gone through the SRBI process and was now in Tier II, the reading specialist who was working with him was not addressing his significant word identification deficits directly or systematically; she was focusing almost exclusively on his comprehension skills. She was not recognizing that his weak comprehension ability was mainly (or solely) a result of his inability to identify words. Although his classroom teacher recognized his struggle with word identification, she admitted that she did not have the expertise or the materials to help him. (She showed us a phonics workbook that she had purchased outside of school.) When the principal of the school joined us near the end of the meeting with Daniel's classroom teacher, his parents and myself told her of our concern. She immediately said that the school had the "Wilson" program (systematic, intensive and multi-sensory phonics) and that the school would assess his phonics skills the next day. I did not ask why they had not yet used this highly effective program for students with dyslexia (although it was designed for students older than Daniel). I related this above story because I do not think that Daniel's story was an anomaly, but instead, I think the inability to identify and instruct student's with dyslexia is relatively widespread. I think that having dyslexia as a separate category on IEPs will help to encourage school districts to learn more about early identification of and appropriate instruction for this population. I believe that providing professional development to enhance the ability of teachers to identify and instruct students with dyslexia will not only help this population, but will also help all students. There are many students with other types of learning problems that would benefit from the methods that work with students with dyslexia and that normally developing students would learn to read and spell more efficiently too.

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