

My name is Susan LeClair Sharp, I live in Vernon, CT, and I have been a special educator since 1978. For the past 17 years, I have been the education director at Ben Bronz Academy in West Hartford, CT, an approved private special education program for students with learning disabilities. I hold an earned doctorate in special education from the University of Connecticut, as well as a number of teaching certificates.

I am here to add my voice in support of RHB 5562, Section 1, An Act Concerning Special Education. However, I urge you to go beyond the current proposal, which merely adds dyslexia to the list of eligibility categories on the state's Individualized Education Program form. A check box acknowledges the reality of dyslexia, an important first step. But we need more than just acknowledgement.

We need a universal definition of dyslexia, which will improve the collective understanding of this challenging disability, as well as allow communication between educators and other service providers. We need professional development in our teacher preparation programs as well as for those educators already practicing in our schools; professional development that focuses on the identification of this disability and the understanding of the special interventions that are needed. We need recognition of the research-based, scientifically validated curriculum and instructional practices that have shown to be effective in helping those with dyslexia learn to read and write, to overcome and to compensate for their learning challenges.

Over my career I have heard countless times that dyslexia cannot be diagnosed before a certain age; that all reading disabilities are the same, and that direct instruction is unnecessary. Based on my professional training and experience over the past 35 years, I believe these are myths that must be dispelled. I have been fortunate to be part of a very effective program that works with students with dyslexia, and am proud to report that, with the right intervention, these students can and do move on to graduate from college and secure employment in a wide diversity of career areas.

This pathway to success begins with identification and intervention. I urge the members of this committee to pass RHB 5562, and to consider it as just a first step in their mission to support effective educational practices for all students.