

**Testimony Before the Education Committee in Support of Bill No. 5562,
An Act Concerning Special Education
Submitted March 13, 2014**

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and Education Committee Members:

My name is Vanessa Vowe, and I reside in Naugatuck, Connecticut. I was an adult literacy tutor for 20 years and am currently the program director of Literacy Volunteers of Greater Waterbury (LVGW). I strongly urge your support of this bill. However, while the addition of SLD - Dyslexia to the individualized education program form is necessary, the bill should also address the critical need for a universal definition of dyslexia and effective professional development for public school educators. All three components are essential if children with dyslexia are to be successful in school and in life.

At Literacy Volunteers, I have become quite familiar with the consequences of allowing children to grow into adulthood without adequate literacy skills. It is heartbreaking to hear the stories of men and women who are unable to read their mail, fill out medical forms at the doctor's office, complete the reading and writing tasks necessary to apply for a job, read a book to their children, decode the myriad of signs that surround them on the street, at the bus station, in the grocery store . . . everywhere, everyday. These are just a few of the many basic demands in life that require the ability to read and write. Can you imagine what your life would be like if you struggled with these?

Because they did not receive effective reading and writing instruction as children, I have listened to the heart-wrenching experiences of many intelligent, creative men and women:

- Who have endured the label of "stupid" throughout their lives,
- Who have been exploited by others,
- Who keep their literacy homework locked in briefcases so that their sons and daughters will not discover that their mothers and fathers cannot read,
- Who have spent a major portion of their lives in prison, without a sense of self-worth and with limited opportunities,
- Who cry because no one understands how much they have suffered.

Unfortunately, many adult literacy students at LVGW were never screened for dyslexia when they were in school. Without that identification, they can only guess at why they have always struggled with reading. Yet, these are individuals who often excel in other areas outside of literacy. For example, one gentleman could take all kinds of scrap materials and turn them into tools and other useful items. Others have run their own businesses, though they needed the help of family or friends to assist with reading and writing tasks. Clearly, these are individuals who are capable of learning to read if taught according to their needs.

It is difficult to address someone's needs without knowing the specifics of the problem as well as the remedies. It is the same with trying to teach someone to read and write. If our children's educators are not equipped to properly identify students who have dyslexia and do not understand how to appropriately teach these students, many children are doomed to the same struggles that the adults in the Literacy Volunteers program face on a daily basis. And, frankly, we ALL suffer as a result—our children, our families, our communities.

Please support Bill No. 5562 with the addition of professional development in our public schools focused on dyslexia awareness and a universal definition of dyslexia that will lead to early identification and rapid provision of appropriate interventions. This help for our children is long overdue.

Thank you.

Vanessa Vowe
Naugatuck, Connecticut