

My name is Brenna Jaskiewicz, I reside in Oakdale, CT and am providing this testimony **in support of SB 1054, An Act Concerning Students With Dyslexia.**

I am a mother of three children, ages 13, 18, & 21. My 18 year old daughter, Stephanie, is a Freshman & Chemistry major at UCONN and is dyslexic. My son, Christopher, age 14 is also dyslexic. With both Stephanie and Christopher I knew something was different with them as early as Kindergarten. I focus on my experiences with Stephanie; as she was the first child I went through this with without having any idea what was wrong. Christopher had the benefit of my experience with Stephanie.

I expressed my concerns regarding Stephanie's inability to read and spell even the smallest of words, but the teachers, administrators, and school psychologist told me she just needed to try harder and practice more. I insisted the school try something, and although she hadn't been flagged by any of their reading assessments as needing help, the school indulged me and included Stephanie in a reading intervention program aimed at improving her oral reading rate (measured in words per minute). Stephanie's tutor in this program was kind and helped Stephanie feel a bit more confident, but it did not increase her reading fluency or spelling. I continued to tell Stephanie's teacher that there was a problem but they assured me that her performance was adequate as measured by their K-3 assessments.

In the beginning of fourth grade, Stephanie's teacher called me stating that she was concerned about Stephanie's yearly reading assessment scores. I was surprised since at the end of third grade her teacher was adamant that Stephanie's scores were fine. This teacher went on to explain that the assessment they use in 4th & 5th grade is different from the K-3 assessment. According to this new assessment Stephanie was a full year behind in her reading performance. This is something I had been saying all along, and although I was glad to see some recognition on the school's part, I was concerned about the discrepancies between the assessments. At this point I requested that Stephanie be given a much more comprehensive assessment. A battery of tests were administered by the district school psychologist and revealed an above average IQ and a solid level of comprehension. Stephanie scored extremely well in abstract reasoning, and very well in any test that was not restricted by time. Her processing

speed was dramatically lower than all of her other scores. After this testing, the school said that although Stephanie seemed to have unexpected difficulty with reading, she did not qualify as learning disabled. The School Psychologist explained Stephanie's very low processing score by saying that Stephanie seemed overly cautious, and was probably taking her time so as to not get an answer wrong.

Stephanie's reading difficulties continued and Stephanie became depressed and said she felt stupid due to the effects of the dyslexia on her reading fluency, spelling and difficulty with rote memorization such as multiplication facts. I had Stephanie attend weekly sessions with the School Based Health clinic counselor to work on her self-esteem. These weekly sessions, coupled with daily reading, spelling and self-esteem sessions with me (her mom) helped keep Stephanie from failing in school and helped to keep her self-worth intact. Helping Stephanie had become my full-time job, on top of the part-time job I had outside the home and in addition to taking care of our other two children.

In 5th grade Stephanie was still having difficulty in reading and spelling, and she was placed in another reading intervention program. This program did help Stephanie track her words per minute and any progress she made. Her rate improved slightly and Stephanie liked the program. At the end of 5th grade, the students were given a summer reading list. Since Stephanie was not able to read any of the suggested books for her grade level, I asked the school if I could borrow the reading intervention program she had been using during the school year. We used this over the summer to keep Stephanie reading, hoping she would not lose any more ground.

Stephanie was (and is) very conscientious. By 6th grade Stephanie was still not reading at an appropriate level as evidenced by her Connecticut Mastery Scores. She once again was put in a reading intervention class which was aimed at improving comprehension. Stephanie hated it, she cried and kept saying, "This isn't helping me, Mom! I understand everything I read; it just takes me forever to read it!"

I explained to Stephanie that she needed to participate in any remediation the school offered, so that she wouldn't be seen as refusing help. They needed to see her try, and try we did. We tried every option the school had to offer, and then some. We even drove to Cranston, Rhode Island to attend tutoring by the Scottish Rite, but the drive

created a hardship for us. I researched on my own, I read Dr. Sally Shawitz book "Overcoming Dyslexia" and for the first time I knew we were not alone. I read about other very bright children like Stephanie who had severe difficulty with reading. This was at the beginning of 7th grade-this is when I knew in my heart that Stephanie was dyslexic. I had the district administer another round of testing which included different tests that were not covered in the typical tests she had already taken. Again, timed tests were her weakest area, her comprehension was high when a story was read aloud to her, but low if she read the story herself. Still, the school said she wasn't learning disabled and since she was passing all of her classes, they didn't see a problem.

I had always refused to let Stephanie fail just to prove that traditional approaches don't work for her. (Letting her fail was halfheartedly suggested to me after a PPT meeting if I really wanted her to be identified as learning disabled and qualify for services; but failing was not an option for us!) I could no longer wait while the school tried inappropriate (perhaps well-intended) remedies, so after nine years of advocating, trial and error intervention programs, several rounds of testing, and endlessly reassuring Stephanie that she was not stupid, I attended a 2 day conference in Maine geared for parents of students with special needs. They suggested I get comprehensive Neuropsychological testing done on Stephanie.

Early in 9th grade I hired a private neuropsychologist who discovered & diagnosed Stephanie's dyslexia and gave specific recommendations for reasonable accommodations in school. The school system did not recognize the dyslexia diagnosis as a specific learning disability but allowed for a few accommodations in a 504 plan based on the fact that she also had been diagnosed with mild ADHD. By this point Stephanie and I had discovered ways to accommodate her learning style and needs at home, so as long as she received extra time on tests including standardized tests I did not fight further for her to have an IEP and be recognized as having a learning disability.

Early identification and the use of evidence-based interventions would have allowed Stephanie to receive an appropriate education based on her needs. It would have

prevented the numerous crying spells and endless hours of unhelpful remediation. I do not want other parents and children to go through the years of strife that Stephanie and I did. It was a constant struggle to not let Stephanie become too depressed and insecure as many dyslexic children do when not identified early and given appropriate instruction and accommodations. Through persistent efforts on both Stephanie's and my parts, and my own research and advocacy on her behalf, Stephanie has done very well in school. Her studies at UCONN take a great deal out of her; she needs to take double the time to read and study as her peers, but she has always had to work harder, so she does whatever it takes. The path should not have to be so difficult and exhausting. Thank God I had the time, patience, intelligence and resources to help Stephanie. I can only imagine the tragic results that other families endure who may not have the same resources I do. Thank you for your time.