Re: Education Committee's Senate Bill # 1054

To whom it may concern:

As a reading specialist, an Orton-Gillingham practitioner, and a special education teacher in a Connecticut suburban middle school, I am all too aware of the consequences for dyslexic students reaching their middle school years without being identified early.

Dyslexic children may not know what their specific disability is called, but they know who they are. The self-esteem of Dyslexics suffers as they struggle to hide their inability to read, often feeling stupid. They are far from stupid. These students are broken, attending schools that are failing them, and you can make a difference!

I would like to see the language in this bill include financial support for thorough ongoing professional development at the district level. If staff were properly trained to comprehensively assess potential dyslexics and interpret that testing, then students would be accurately diagnosed at an early age. Once diagnosed, highly trained teachers would deliver effective research-based interventions. A preponderance of research has shown that one of the most effective techniques when working with dyslexic students is the Orton-Gillingham approach to reading.

Currently many dyslexic children go undiagnosed because the assessments commonly used by districts to determine dyslexia aren't comprehensive enough. The state must provide specific guidelines for a comprehensive assessment testing battery to be administered when trying to diagnose dyslexia.

I can make this statement because I have witnessed this first hand in four separate CT school districts. The Department of Education should provide specific assessments that must be included when testing for dyslexia, and insist that error analysis is a component of that testing protocol. Most dyslexic students that have crossed my path over the years are bright children with cognitive capabilities solidly in place. They can attain average or higher scores on silent standardized comprehension measures commonly used in districts. Dyslexic students may even score in the average range on word identification tests because they have committed many words to sight, resulting in higher raw scores. Unless the evaluator conducts an error analysis of responses within the assessment, staff dismisses the possibility of dyslexia. This ability to analyze errors requires a knowledgebase few teachers in our schools currently possess, and therefore it's not done. Once comprehensive testing is delivered, then professional development is needed for proper interpretation of those test scores.

Many professionals truly don't know what a dyslexic profile looks like. There are commonalities, but profiles vary. A dyslexic child stands out from their non-dyslexic peers when they are asked to orally read grade level material, regardless of the grade that child is in. If that oral reading passage is timed, my experience has been that they will consistently read below the 50th percentile, often more than 15 words correct per

minute below. Oral reading fluency is a documented deficit area with dyslexics, yet many districts are not conducting universal fluency screens in grades 1-8. Professional development and training in the area of assessment and remediation can and will make a difference.

It is my hope that this legislation will create a clear awareness of the academic and emotional ramifications for this population. Let this legislation open the doors to comprehensive teacher training and ongoing professional development for all staff, by allocating funds to districts and teacher certification programs. Let this bill provide clear comprehensive assessment guidelines, and interpretation of that data. With these items in place, knowledgeable staff will possess the skills required to identify dyslexics early, and target their specific needs.

Maybe, just maybe, these students will only require morpheme instruction by the time they reach my classroom door, instead of very basic sound/symbol correspondence and syllable work. Let's end the language that too many parents have heard teachers voice, "You're child is lazy", or, "Your child needs to work harder."

I am in support of Senate Bill #1054, and legislation can make a profound difference in the lives of dyslexic students. Let's work together to make this dream a reality.

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