

Testimony of Gina Maroney
On Raised Senate Bill No. 1054
March 11, 2015

Dear Members of the Education Committee:

I am writing you to ask for your support of S.B. 1054, An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia, but I am also requesting additional support in the form of early identification requirements and appropriate researched based interventions for the children of Connecticut.

I would like to share my personal story with you. I have a beautiful, bright, lively 13 year old daughter, Mary, who is currently in 7th grade at Northwestern Region #7 Middle School. The problem is we JUST found out in July, 2014 that she is reading at a 3rd grade level! Her struggle with reading started when she was in first grade. I was in constant contact with her teacher who told me she was not quite sure what was going on but assured me Mary was getting the help she needed. Two weeks before 1st grade was over, her teacher came to me and told me Mary did poorly on a reading evaluation and said she thought Mary had a reading disability. I was shocked since I had repeatedly expressed my concern throughout the entire school year. After meeting with the school, who again assured me Mary would get the help she needed in 2nd grade, my husband and I decided to not waste any more time and had a private neuropsychology assessment done which did show that Mary has a reading disability. Her IQ is normal so she should be able to learn to read. (These assessments are typically not covered by insurance because they are for 'educational purposes' and cost us \$2,000. New Hartford Public Schools has no one qualified to conduct neuropsychology assessments.)

Mary immediately had an Independent Educational Plan (IEP) developed by the school in the beginning of 2nd grade and I was repeatedly told over the years that Mary was getting the instruction she needed to improve her reading. We were always told Mary was one year behind her peers compared to where she should be. At the end of 6th grade we were surprised to learn that Mary made no progress but actually fell further behind her peers and was now 1 year 7 months behind where she should be. This news shocked us and we asked for an outside, independent reading evaluation which the school agreed to. We were even more shocked when we got the results of this independent evaluation and learned in July, 2014 that Mary was actually reading at a 3rd grade level and was about to start 7th grade. Additional reading evaluations performed by Region #7 personnel, substantiated these findings and now we are met with trying to help our daughter manage the work required in 7th grade while only being able to read like a 3rd grader. I have not even mentioned the many tearful nights over the years, the frustration, and the poor self-esteem that my

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daughter now has because she was not given the proper research based instruction that she so desperately needed.

My story is far from over and only gets more troubling since dyslexia can have a genetic component. I have a 5th grade son, Matthew, who also struggles with reading. He is a "slow" reader according to the school but I have found that he does struggle with some of the same aspects of reading that his sister continues to have difficulty with. Not wanting to waste any more time, we (my husband and I, not the school because they refused our request) recently had a neuropsychological test performed on him and are awaiting the results. Matthew has difficulty with **decoding** words, reading **fluency**, and **spelling**. The Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education publication entitled, *IEP Manual and Forms* states:

"Dyslexia is included in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) as a specific learning disability (SLD). Dyslexia impacts reading, specifically **decoding** and accurate and/or **fluent** word recognition and **spelling**."

I hope you can see why I am worried for my son's future and that my personal story proves that additional legislation is needed to provide early assessments/identification, evidence-based interventions and professional development guidance. Early identification and intervention is essential! My daughter did not get the proper researched based instruction that she so desperately needed and I fear the same for Matthew. Our Connecticut students deserve better. They deserve to have teachers who are properly trained to identify dyslexia very early in a child's education and then receive research based appropriate instruction.

As a resident in the State of Connecticut, I request your support of upcoming Dyslexia legislation.

Sincerely,

Gina Maroney, parent

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