

Testimony for Public Hearing  
Education Committee  
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CT Decoding Dyslexia Supporter

**Senate Bill No. 1054: An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia**

Good afternoon Members of the Education Committee. My name is Karima A. Robinson. I am an educator, administrator, and artist as well as a former tutor for Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven. I have over ten years of teaching experience at the college level. As a tutor at Literacy Volunteers I taught adults how to read. Over the course of a year I had six students. All of them were functioning at a first grade reading level, essentially they were illiterate. I am here today to ask you to consider the following issues as you draft **Senate Bill No. 1054: An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia**.

Initially it alarmed me that healthy, intelligent, and caring adults could not read street signs or application forms, including health forms or employment applications. Of my six students, I had three senior citizens in their 70s, and three adults in their 30s. They also could not read their mail or prescription bottles. They could not pass a driver's license exam. How did they survive? By pretending to know how to read or "tricking" others into helping them (by fanning poor eye sight for example).

I am also a dyslexic adult. As a tutor I recognized the traits of dyslexia in my adult students. I am fortunate that I learned how to compensate for my disability early on. However, for those whose condition is more severe, if the interventions that we are requesting are not enacted, our education system will continue to fail up to 20% for our children.

If you cannot complete a job application or write a resume, can you work? If you cannot pass a driver's license exam, can you drive? The answer is yes and no. Yes you can work, if you can find someone to either fill out the forms for you, or if someone is willing to give you a job under the table. Yes you can drive, without a license and without the ability to read street signs. This is illegal, but possible. Illiterate adults are forced to live a high risk lifestyle of "minor" illegal offenses that could ultimately put the public in danger. Adults who are forced to pretend to read in order to maintain their dignity, put all of us in jeopardy. Imagine an illiterate home health care worker, caring for *your* elderly parent who cannot read their hospital discharge

papers or prescription bottles. Horrifying? Yes. And it happens all the time. Worse yet illiterate adults who struggle to work, or frequently lose their jobs because they are unable to read instructions, end up committing crimes to provide for themselves and their families.

There is a wealth of evidence to confirm the correlation between dyslexia and low-reading levels, as well as poor reading levels and truancy. Truancy is a factor that often leads to school suspensions.

If you neglect special education needs, kids will act out... Kids are not getting the worst of both worlds. They are not getting the services they need and they are getting kicked out and getting into the justice system more often. *Connecticut Health Investigates Team. Prisons Try to Span Learning Gap. By Gail Braccidiferro MacDonald. August 4, 2001.*

Students who do not get the help they need will continue on a path that leads to expulsion, possible juvenile detention, and even adult incarceration. Make no mistake about it, undiagnosed and untreated dyslexia is a factor in the school to prison pipeline. Early identification of dyslexia in a child, necessary interventions, and referrals to special education services is not just an education issue. If we continue to ignore this issue and thereby fail up to 20% of our children, we are actively perpetuating the school to prison epidemic.

In New Haven County alone, 30% of the adult population is functionally illiterate. Last year Literacy Volunteers tutored over 1,200 adults in basic literacy skills. Most students they serve are functioning at the lower end of the spectrum, from kindergarten to fourth grade levels.

According to the U.S. Department of Education 60% of American's prison inmates are illiterate and 85% of all juvenile offenders have reading difficulties. *The Importance of Remediating Dyslexia.* <http://www/specialeducationadvisor.com/the-importance-of-remediating-dyslexia/>

While the prevalence of dyslexia in the general population is about 20%, the prevalence of dyslexia in prisoners is more than twice that or 48%. *Scientific study conducted by Dr. K.C. Moody and colleagues at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Conjunction with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (2000).* <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10876375>

I recommend that **Senate Bill No. 1054: An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia** provide essential training for teachers and educators in order for them to recognize the characteristics of dyslexia and intervene in the lives of our children to meet their special education needs.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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