

My name is Linda Sceles-Straubel; I am a parent and live in Darien, CT. I support the legislation Senate Bill 1054, An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia, but also support a few enhancements to the proposed bill. My husband and I moved to Darien CT over twelve's years ago because we wanted to live in a family oriented community with an excellent school district within commuting distance to New York City, where at the time we both worked. We enjoyed raising our two children in the Darien community but our experienced completely changed when our children entered the Darien Public School system, struggled significantly with reading/writing, and ultimately diagnosed with Dyslexia. Our family knows firsthand how difficult it is to obtain an appropriate intervention program for children with Dyslexia and therefore I want to help make this process easier for other families by supporting Senate Bill 1054.

I stopped working when my oldest child was in first grade struggling with dyslexia. Although, we had many conversations with the teacher about our family history with dyslexia and the obvious signs my oldest was showing, up to that point she was only receiving SRBI intervention. As a working mom, I did not know how the school system worked and how important it was to educate myself on dyslexia so that I could advocate for my child. Once I learned what to do, in the beginning of 2nd grade I sent a letter requesting testing and about 1/3 of the way through 2nd grade that my daughter finally started to receive basic special education services under "specific learning disability". In addition, my child started working with a tutor 2x a week until as a family we made the decision to place our oldest child in a private school at our own expense for third grade and beyond. Working with the public school system was time consuming, frustrating and extremely stressful for all members of our family. We felt stigmatized in our once friendly community and that had a significant impact on our family. Two years later, we went through a very similar ordeal with the Darien School district when we identified my youngest child with dyslexia early in first grade.

Our family is lucky; Connecticut has a wealth of terrific resources, active nonprofits and even the premier research facility for dyslexia at Yale University. In addition, both of my children got into one of the best schools in the country for Dyslexic children, The Windward School. Windward is very competitive to get into because it has limited capacity and openings are only available for students with specific profiles to meet existing student class structure or for groups of new applicants with similar skill levels for which Windward can create new classes. Windward changed my children's lives forever. My children blossomed at Windward, developing excellent reading and writing skills, gaining confidence as well as self-advocacy skills. It has also been an incredibly supportive environment for parents and students alike, which provides a sophisticated system to develop knowledge of dyslexia and related disability issues. We are fortunate to be part of this community but few families have this opportunity.

The Dyslexic legislation is extremely necessary. Children need to be identified with dyslexia early in their elementary school careers if they have any chance for academic success. Dyslexia should be categorized under the "specific learning disability- Dyslexia" in as a primary disability section on the IEP so schools know how to develop appropriate programs. Once identified, children need a comprehensive researched and

evidence based intervention program based on the Orton Gillingham methodology provided by a well-trained certified teacher. Special education teachers and reading specialist must be qualified to provide a program based on the OG methodology. In addition, general education teachers and administrators should be required to be thoroughly trained in the warning signs of dyslexia and evidence-research based approaches for teaching children with different learning needs. Finally, Dyslexia does not go away, our children will always need more time to read and write; so, all dyslexic students should be allowed to obtain and maintain extra time as an accommodation even after they master grade level curriculum.

I have been involved with many nonprofit groups, who provide educational programs, great websites and newsletters to help educate the public on learning disabilities. Through these programs and committee meetings in my local as well as surrounding communities, I have met hundreds of families who have and are going through very similar battles with their local schools as they advocate for their children. The lack of education in our academic community is a huge problem but there is a wealth of information available to school districts to make changes to their existing systems.

Even in a wealthy community such as Darien, CT, parents had to file complaints to the State to get an investigation of special education violations. Darien was investigated and found guilty of over 25 State and Federal laws along with a list of recommendations. Darien has been going through a huge transition because of these findings. Many other communities have similar issues. I believe that legislation, at this point, is the most efficient way to effect change in all communities to address the needs of the 15% to 20% of our school age population with dyslexia, who simply need a different approach to learn to read and write. Appropriate interventions are well documented and training is readily available in various OG based interventions. Why are many districts waiting to make a significant difference in a child's life? The academic and special education community must start addressing these children's needs instead of being scared of these students because they have not been trained in alternative methods of reading and writing instruction.

I strongly support this Senate Bill 1054 but with a few enhancements. Dyslexia should absolutely be a separate category on the IEP because it will help the school identify and design specific interventions for our students. Parents and students need to know they have dyslexia so they know they are part of a larger community of successful individuals and so they know that they are not alone. Educators need to be qualified to teach these students with research-evidenced based interventions. Educators need to receive continuing education, so that special and general education teachers as well as administrators know the warning signs of dyslexia and are aware of the research based intervention programs design for students who learn differently so they can identify struggling students early in their elementary careers. Our children should be allowed to continue to get the accommodation of extra time, even after they have mastered their basic skills. All districts are struggling with helping our dyslexic population, so what better way to help our students then by setting up a stronger intervention structure. The Bill will help all Connecticut educators even the playing field for our students, no matter what school district they attend.

Thank you for this opportunity it support the dyslexic community and for your consideration of this very important bill.

Sincerely,  
Linda Sceles-Straubel