

March 9, 15

My name is Cayden Dunn and I am a ninth grade student at Newtown High School. I would like to thank the Education Committee for the opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill No. 1054, An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia.

I'd like to tell you what life is like for me now, as a student, and how I got here.

When I am done I hope that you will realize that this road was longer and more difficult than it had to be. I survived it because I have parents who were involved in my education and who had the resources to get me the proper help. Not every kid has that. By modifying and passing Senate Bill No. 1054, we will be one step closer to saving our CT students from that long hard road.

I am currently an A student. I have been on the honor roll every semester since 8<sup>th</sup> grade. When I walk into a new classroom now, I introduce myself to my teacher and tell her that I am dyslexic. Most times I have to explain dyslexia to her and how it affects me in the classroom. Even though it is written in my IEP or 504, I have to tell her what I need from her to succeed in her class. I tell her that I will need audio books, and I may ask for a copy of the class notes on some days. I may need extra time on tests or clarification of test questions and I will have to use a computer for writing because that is how I do my best work. I spend a lot of time educating my teachers. But that's ok with me because I can't expect them to know about a disability if they were never taught about it.

Unfortunately, my elementary school teachers did not know about dyslexia either. I struggled to read and write from kindergarten to 5<sup>th</sup> grade. I always had great teachers that really wanted to help me, but they didn't know how. They just kept telling me to try harder. I hated school and myself because no matter how hard I tried I just couldn't read and write at grade level.

It wasn't until 5<sup>th</sup> grade that my private tutor suspected that I could be dyslexic. My school would not test me, so I was tested privately. By 6<sup>th</sup> grade I was diagnosed with dyslexia but my school would not agree to use an evidence-based reading program to help me. I did not make significant progress that year.

In 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I left Newtown Public schools and attended The Prospect School at Wooster. This school is specifically for kids with learning differences. There I completed the Wilson reading program and worked intensively on writing and math skills. In just one year, with the right kind of help, I was at grade level for reading and my writing and math skills improved tremendously. It was at The Prospect School that I learned to cope with my learning disability because I was surrounded by people that understood how to help me.

In short, what I want you to know is, that my story does not have to happen to other kids. All of our CT teachers should be educated about dyslexia so they can understand their students. All of our CT kids should be screened for dyslexia in elementary school so that they can keep their self-esteem. And finally, all of our CT

schools should use reading and writing programs that are proven to work for dyslexic students so that we don't waste any more of the student's and teacher's precious time. Thank you.