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Testimony in support of Senate Bill No. 1054, An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia:

I am greatly relieved and grateful to all those responsible for bringing this Bill to fruition.

For 30 years, I have provided instruction and therapy to individuals of all ages who are dyslexic. I want to relate to you the reason for my interest and involvement with individuals who struggled to learn to read in spite of average or better cognitive abilities.

In the late '80s, businesses across the Country began to downsize and a great number of people lost their jobs. I was working as a career counselor with money provided by the Government for "Dislocated Workers" when a man in his 30's applied in hopes of receiving re-training funds. As part of the interview, a brief literacy test was administered. I was surprised at the results and made a comment to this man that I wondered if he had always struggled with his reading. When I looked up at the man, tears were streaming down his face and I was horrified that I had upset him so greatly and apologized to him. He said that he was relieved that someone now knew and that he'd been hiding this all his life. As a former English teacher, it occurred to me that I had no idea of how to help this man and told him so. That changed the path that I was on, searched for and found the wonderful program at Mass. General Hospital for teaching individuals with dyslexia. It was a 300 hour program, studying the research on dyslexia, while simultaneously providing supervised instruction to several children.

This program was based on the philosophy and methods of Orton-Gillingham, the grandfather of the evidenced-based multisensory, structured language instruction to which most individuals with dyslexia respond successfully. The key however, is that the teacher providing such instruction must be highly trained much as a medical specialist would be, since dyslexia is a disorder. It isn't a medical intervention that is needed, but an educational intervention that at present isn't widely recognized in coursework given to aspiring teachers. A few colleges are beginning to offer appropriate courses of study, but nowhere in Connecticut.

The Bill in question must include strong language to enforce the necessity for appropriate training for teachers based on research. This training, it should be noted, will benefit *all* children since the basic fundamental underlying elements of the reading process are stressed in the evidence-based instruction to which children with dyslexia respond. All kindergarten and 1st grade teachers should be allowed to learn "how" to teach children to read and what to do when a child is struggling.

Thank you,

Jean Sawicki, MA