My name is Liam Kells and I live in Fairfield, CT. I am a junior at Fairfield College Preparatory School. I am in support of Senate Bill 1054, An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia, however additional language needs to be added to address screening and evidence-based interventions taught by a specialist in reading.

Although I am now attending a rigorous high school and that is demanding and prominent academically, I would not have been able to be successful at Fairfield Prep had I stayed in the public school system. I have severe dyslexia that went undetected until I reached the 3rd grade, even after the school tested me, in the 2nd grade, for a learning disability. My parents had to get me tested again by a private evaluator to prove that I had a learning problem. After that I received special education services for 2 years, but the reading instruction was not sufficient and I still could barely read. I was falling behind in school because I could not read the text in each of my subjects. I was also beginning to act up because I was feeling humiliated for not being able to read like my peers. My parents took me out of public school at the end of the 4th grade and put me in a private school that taught me how to read using the Orton Gillingham method, which is an evidence based reading program.

There are certain signs of dyslexia that are exhibited as early as in a child's Kindergarten year. I had all the signs and should have been screened for this potential problem in my Kindergarten year or at least in 1st grade. The brain is much more pliable at this young age, and more available to change, if proper evidence based instruction is provided on a consistent bases. Had my dyslexia been recognized in these very early grades and addressed, I am sure that I would not have had to leave public school to get the intense instruction I received in 5th to 8th grade.

Sadly, it was not the local school that finally recognized my dyslexia, but a private evaluator that my parents hired, because my parents just knew intuitively that something was wrong. Although my school did not recognize my learning disability in those early years, my parents wanted to have my school provide the proper reading instruction, so I could stay in the school surroundings that were familiar to me. However, the special education reading instruction, that I received in 3rd and 4th grade, in my local school, was provided in an inconsistent and arbitrary manner resulting in barely any reading progress at all. I believe that if the evidence based instruction, which was provided rather late, starting in my 4th grade year, was administered with intensity, consistency, and fidelity, I still might not have needed to leave public school.

My parents could not wait any longer for the public school to do what was needed for me. Time was going by and I was now entering 5th grade, a non reader, with no ability to access the content in my subject classes. Had I stayed in public school my academic outlook would have been totally different than it is today. I went to Winston Preparatory School for 4 years, where I received proper reading instruction on an individual basis, for 45 minutes everyday. I left Winston Prep at the end of 8th grade, ready and able to access academics at the school I now attend, Fairfield Prep.

I am a very lucky person because my parents were able to afford to send me to this private school, Winston Prep. However, I am very aware that most dyslexic students are not able to leave their public schools that are failing them since private schools like Winston Prep are incredibly expensive. It is wrong that dyslexic students often get an inferior education since public schools are often so ill equipped to provide the appropriate instruction. But this lesser education happens every day in our CT public schools. Without early identification and evidence based instruction from teachers that are certified in using these methods, dyslexic students will continue to fall way behind academically. Most people with dyslexia are astonishly smart. But without an education that furnishes dyslexic students with the tools to learn in school, they will fall far short of their academic potential and ultimately impede their success in their professional lives.

Lastly, there is a psychological price, that should be noted, that is often payed by the dyslexic student, as well. Since dyslexic people are usually so bright, they are perfectly mindful that they can not keep up with their peers and are left to feel stupid and ashamed for not being as successful in school as they could be. This kind of stigma stays with a student for the rest of their lives. Dyslexics often second guess their gifts and overall strengths, as they are certain that they are subordinate in all areas. The irony and shame of this emotional cost is incredibly regrettable.

Dyslexia needs to be recognized, early detection has to happen, and legitimate instruction has to take place with fidelity and intensity. If not, our public schools will continue to fail our students with dyslexia.

Thank you for taking the time to read my story.

Liam Kells