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Testimony re. SB 1054, Section 1, An Act Concerning Special Education

Co-Chairs Senators Slossberg and Representative Fleishman and members of the Committee, I support SB 1054, and request you provide additional language supporting the need to identify and provide appropriate interventions for dyslexia.

I testified a year ago in front of this committee to support bill RHB 5562. The bill was a good start in terms of helping children struggling with dyslexia but there still is plenty needing to be done to help many children attending Connecticut Schools. My name is Marc Hoffman, and I am the owner of Hoffman Education, Strong Start Early Care & Education and Marc Hoffman Educational Consulting. I serve as Board Chair of Eye to Eye, the only national mentoring movement that pairs kids who have learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (LD / ADHD) with college and high school mentors who have been similarly labeled. I'm a Learning Disability Advocate and dyslexic. My experiences with dyslexia have led me to the work I do today. I wake up every day with the goal of helping ensure that all children receive an appropriate education. I ask that you consider the urgency for change regarding the issue of dyslexia in Connecticut Public Schools.

The occurrence of dyslexia in the overall population is about 20%; the prevalence of dyslexia in prisons is more than twice that, or 48% according to a scientific study that took place in 2000.

We are fortunate to have leaders in our state who appreciate both the urgency for change and the magnitude of the change that must occur to help dyslexic students. Parents, Advocates, Students, Teachers and Educators continue to champion the need for dyslexia awareness. The current language in SB 1054 is a step in the right direction but not enough. The paramount need is that the legislation addresses the lack of awareness on the part of some schools. Many misperceptions exist such as Dyslexia being a site issue when in reality it interferes with the acquisition and processing of language. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition, and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These problems normally result from a deficit in the phonological component of language.

The dyslexia movement's interest is not to label children but to ensure that all educators have at least a basic understanding of dyslexia. For starters, this is required on the part of teachers because they are the ones directly dealing with children and they need to know the characteristics, symptoms, of dyslexia. Empirical evidence demonstrates that dyslexia is a physiological reality and not simply developmental. The treatment approach used in some CT schools is not addressing the phonemic awareness issue.

Even though dyslexia is a disability that is recognized and is covered under provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, I still see too many children dealing with educational trauma because they are misunderstood. In many cases they are not given the resources to remediate their challenges with reading. By definition, to be dyslexic, you have to have at least average intelligence. With that in mind, many children with dyslexia are brilliant but being marginalized and not given the chance to reach their potential. We are losing the next

Steven Spielberg, Charles Schwab, Will Smith and even the next Albert Einstein, all Dyslexics, because no matter how smart they are, in many cases, when children constantly experience academic failure because their learning environment does not understand their cognitive profiles, they stop trying. Society needs people that think differently and tackle problems in a creative way, characteristics of many dyslexics.

Respectfully,

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