

**Testimony of Margaret Balboni, Literacy How Mentor  
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Education Committee's Senate Bill No. 1054, An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia  
March 11, 2015

Representative Fleischmann, Senator Stillman, and Members of the Education Committee, I present testimony on behalf of the students in our State that we are failing. I am their tutor. I've heard their mother's pleas and I've seen their hopeful, tentative faces. Jack, whom you've met before, a mop haired courageous blonde who wants more than anything to enter back into public education. You know his mother too, the one who treks back and forth to Springfield to the Curtis Blake Day School so that her son can be given the intensive reading instruction that he needs. Addisyn, just a bit of a thing, with an even larger personality; her favorite season is winter. She has the courage to snowboard; won't someone in her public school system have the courage to learn to teach her to spell words? Aram, the son of two brilliant UConn professors, brilliant in his own right, yet dysfluent and disheartened at age 7. And just last week, Monique, a talented, kind-hearted eighth grader received the news that she's dyslexic. What if middle school teachers received professional development in the early identification and intervention of girls like Mo? How would the course of her life have been changed? What if I didn't have a clinic set up in my home to take in students after their school day has ended? Who would meet their needs?

Thank you for raising the Senate Bill 1054. I respectfully suggest that the bill include early identification of students with dyslexia as well as appropriate interventions to effectively teach dyslexic students.

You may wonder who I am. How do I know how to teach these kids? I had the good fortune of receiving evidence-based training from the late Dr. Anne Fowler and Dr. Susan Brady at Haskins Laboratories. I've listened to countless researchers first hand and worked with a team of experts to translate that research for classroom teachers. I continue this good work under the leadership of Dr. Margie Gillis at Literacy How because I am one of a team of twelve reading experts who mentor classroom teachers across our State. We teach them how to apply research-based reading methods to ensure that all children learn to read well. Over the past fourteen years, we've mentored preschool through adult education teachers across Connecticut. I connect with these educators because I too graduated without the knowledge of how to effectively teach a child to read. The good news is that fate intervened and I was able to learn how to diagnose and treat specific reading disabilities. But are we, the adults really willing to leave the education of the Jack's and the Addy's up to happenstance? No, of course not. Not when we have the ability to define specific programmatic requirements for teacher preparation courses related to dyslexia and to include dyslexia diagnosis and instruction as part of the in-service training for educators.

Unfortunately, I've encountered far too many well-meaning teachers who lack the skills to provide intensive, diagnostic multisensory intervention. Their classrooms are devoid of optimal instruction in phoneme awareness, in decoding, in the application of those skills to text. They don't know how to effectively teach students to understand the way in which a sentence works and how those sentences are linked together to build coherent text. They know their children are struggling, but they never learned what to do to meet the needs of those students who struggle to learn to read, so it becomes somebody else's job. Not the special educator, they missed out too. From someone who receives far too many calls, far too many questions about what to do for the Jacks, the Addy's, the Aram's and the Mo's please consider adding language to Bill 1054 to ensure that all children get the intensive diagnostic instruction they are entitled to in Connecticut's public school classrooms.

Respectfully submitted,

Margaret Balboni