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To: Edtestimony@cga.ct.gov

Subject: Senate Bill No. 1054, An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia

Dear State of Connecticut Legislators:

I am writing in support of SB No. 1054 and to request your approval of this legislation. This legislation is an important step towards meeting the needs of individuals with dyslexia.

From my experience and perspective, however, the focus of this legislation is important but insufficient; this bill is not comprehensive enough to support early identification or to guarantee the provision of the kind of instruction required to address the learning needs of those with dyslexia. Qualified practitioners are at the heart of the solution for this educational need and legislation can help to ensure that Connecticut institutions of higher education produce the caliber of teachers that are required. While teachers can certainly improve their knowledge through in-service, the locus of greatest impact is through teacher preparation programs (i.e., pre-service). Changes in the content, intensity, and fidelity of instructional practice must be the areas of emphasis with any effort to address this need.

This preparation should not be limited to specialists who work with the most seriously impaired. Rather, classroom teachers, who with the knowledge of the necessary content and effective instructional practices, can bring about significant change. Thirty years ago while working as a special education administrator in a public school district in Connecticut, I had the opportunity to witness the profoundly positive impact from providing a code-based (i.e., an evidence-based) reading program in general education classrooms. Through in-service training and supervision, teachers expanded their skills to teach reading. With this change in teacher knowledge, the district witnessed a reduction in the number of referrals to special education, a reduction in duration and intensity of support services, and a provision of an instructional bridge between general education classrooms and special services. Additionally, the classroom-based instructional approach produced a better outcome for all students in the classroom because teachers' knowledge improved instruction for all students.

Early detection and appropriate instruction are critical. Why? In addition to cost factors resulting from reduced referrals and the need for less intensive and costly interventions, research indicates that the probability is high that a child who is a poor reader at the end of first grade will remain a poor reader by the end of fourth grade; once behind in reading, those children remain behind (see Juel, C. (1988). *Learning to Read and Write: A Longitudinal Study of 54 Children From First Through Fourth Grades*. Journal of Educational Psychology, Vol 80. No. 4, 437-447). Research—educational and scientific—has also clarified characteristics of children with dyslexia that allow educators to identify, as well as to teach those who are identified. With the right

knowledge and support, teachers are able to identify and teach effectively. Professional preparation is the vehicle to address these needs.

The reality is that we have—actually *have had*—the knowledge to address this instructional need for many years. Forty years ago, NICHD recognized that poor readers are not only an educational problem, but also a public health issue. Even though dyslexia presents as an instructional problem during the school years, these learning problems often contribute to experiences for these individuals of under education, under employment, and social problems throughout their lives. This makes it even more urgent to seize the opportunity to put our collective knowledge and experience to work through this legislation.

Educators know enough—based on the science of reading, identification and treatment—to bring a more robust response to the need of individuals with dyslexia. This bill has the potential to accomplish more by expanding its scope to include screening for early identification and instructional components that can make a significant difference in our education system here in Connecticut. As currently written, the bill doesn't go far enough to make a change in what teachers know and do for students to reduce or eliminate the debilitating life-long impacts of being unable to read.

Thank you for your consideration of this perspective. The welfare of innumerable individuals depends on your actions.

Most sincerely,

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