

Testimony of the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center on Education Committee RSB 1054
March 11, 2015

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and distinguished members of the Education Committee, my name is Nancy Prescott and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center, known to many as CPAC. CPAC is a statewide non-profit organization whose sole purpose is to provide training and information to parents of children with any disability so they can effectively collaborate with schools in developing appropriate educational programs designed to ensure their child's success in school and life. The success of our work is ultimately measured by positive education outcomes for students with disabilities.

Senate Bill 1054 continues to focus attention on the failure of our current education system in identifying and meeting the unique learning needs of children with dyslexia. We support SB 1054 with reservation because we feel it still falls short in fully addressing the critical needs of children with dyslexia. We believe that the highest priority should be given to preparing education professionals, at both the pre-service and in-service levels, to conduct early identification of children with dyslexia and to implement evidence based practices we know help children with dyslexia develop the skills they need to learn to read and become successful students.

According to the National Center on Learning Disabilities, "...dyslexia is a lifelong challenge. This language-based processing disorder can hinder reading, writing, spelling and sometimes even speaking." CPAC staff members speak to parents throughout the state who suspect their child may have dyslexia and or may have already been identified with dyslexia. More often than not, this particular diagnosis comes from a professional outside of the school system. Ensuring that our public schools have the understanding and tools for early and appropriate identification of dyslexia is one of the important features we feel is missing from the bill as proposed. We feel it is imperative that the Education Committee recognizes that like any disability, dyslexia has no socio-economic, language or racial boundaries. A family's circumstances and ability to seek outside evaluations, tutoring or support should not take the place of the public school system's responsibility to appropriately identify and teach a child with any disability, including dyslexia.

Two main themes emerge in the parent stories we hear. One theme is, from an early age there are a group of children who appear capable of learning to read, yet regardless of the intensity or frequency of interventions tried by the school the child is unsuccessful in mastering this critical skill. A second common theme we see relates to students who are identified as eligible for special education services under the broad category of specific learning disability. In far too many cases, even with the benefit of specialized instruction the student fails to make significant gains. This problem is shared with us by parents from all walks of life, from all races, ethnicities, and from all socio-economic and educational levels. Our experience tells us that students with dyslexia are an underserved group of students included in CT's achievement gap. Current school reform efforts have not and will not meet their learning needs.

SB 1054 continues the conversation, started in earnest in the last legislative session, about how public schools need to think differently about meeting the unique needs of children with dyslexia. At this point in time, with some of the most renowned researchers in the field doing work in our own state over the past several decades, it is unacceptable that any child with dyslexia should have to wait to receive the supports and services that we know they need and are effective. As a professional trained in this field in CT, it deeply saddens me that we have to even consider legislation to make best practice a reality for children who we know struggle to learn the critical skill of reading.

Parents frequently report to us that the team they are working with does not understand the nature of dyslexia. Often parents are the ones doing intensive research to figure out what might help their child. Because students with dyslexia may be very bright, but still have significant struggles, sometimes they are blamed for not trying, blamed for being lazy, blamed for not paying attention. They are often told they could do better if only they just

Testimony of the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center on Education Committee RSB 1054

March 11, 2015

wanted to do better. The time has come for educators to become more informed on the disability, so no student is being blamed for their disability. Dyslexia is a highly misunderstood disability and that will not change unless we educate the educators about what they can do to help these students. The good news is that there are interventions that research has shown are effective for students with dyslexia. The bad news is there are not nearly enough highly trained individuals prepared and certified in those research-based programs. School personnel must be better prepared to conduct early screening and identification of children who have dyslexia and they must have professional development in order to utilize effective, research based interventions with rigor and fidelity.

Please consider amending Senate Bill 1054 to include a sole focus on providing teachers with the pre-service education and on-going professional development they need to appropriately identify and effectively teach students with dyslexia.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nancy Prescott".

Nancy Prescott
Executive Director
nprescott@cpacinc.org