

**Testimony of Dr. Margie B. Gillis,  
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SB 317 An Act Concerning Dyslexia  
March 2, 2016**

Representative Fleischmann, Senator Slossberg, and Members of the Education Committee. I first want to thank you for raising the bill and for your support of legislation that promotes high quality evidence-based reading instruction for our dyslexic population. I am presenting this testimony to respectfully request that you support SB 317, **An Act Concerning Dyslexia**, with some additional language to strengthen its impact on our children. **The present bill as written must include requirements for candidates seeking a remedial reading endorsement to ensure that ALL children, including those diagnosed with dyslexia, receive instruction matched to their learning profiles that is provided by knowledgeable and experienced reading teachers.**

Over the past 10 years, I have presented testimony all with a common theme – that is, to urge the state department of education and the legislature to work closely together to protect our most vulnerable children. Many of these children don't read well. For 15 years I taught children and adults with dyslexia to read. It required years of study and coursework, many hours of supervised instruction, and hundreds of hours of experience teaching children who presented with different strengths and weaknesses. After careful thought, I decided to leave the special education world behind in order to provide professional development for general education teachers. I left because I believed that I would have a greater impact on children if I could work with teachers to empower them with knowledge and skills. Over the course of fifteen years working in schools around the state, I have seen first-hand that teachers are not adequately prepared to diagnostically assess and prescriptively teach children fundamental reading skills. Dyslexia's core deficit is in the area of phonological processing. In layperson's language, these individuals have difficulty processing (i.e., hearing and understanding) the sounds that make up words. Although most K-3 educators know the term *phonemic awareness* and some can even define it, they don't understand it well enough to teach it explicitly, effectively, and to mastery. Of the hundreds of teachers we've surveyed over the past 15 years, the average score on a test that demonstrates their understanding of the concept is **50%**. This means that most teachers don't know how to recognize when children struggle to master that all-important skill and equally important, they don't know how to teach the skill properly. And this is just one of many key concepts that teachers must master to be skilled practitioners.

This bill must be expanded to include what diagnosis and instruction should look like and what teacher qualifications should include to meet our children's needs. A graduate level program of study must reflect evidence-based structured literacy principles and practices **and include supervised practice experiences to support candidates' ability to successfully implement systematic, explicit, direct, multi-sensory, structured literacy interventions in reading, writing, and spelling for students who require remedial reading interventions, including students with Dyslexia.**

Again, I thank you for your commitment to our students – especially those who need teachers who have the knowledge and expertise to ensure that they master the most important skill they will ever learn – knowing how to read!