

Education Committee: This is my written testimony regarding S.B. No. 317. I will not be testifying at the Hearing.

My name is Jean Sawicki from Mansfield, CT. I am a Reading Therapist and have worked for over 20 years with individuals of all ages who are dyslexic. I have been a classroom English teacher and have taught English as a Second Language as well. I have a Masters degree in Education with a focus on learning disabilities, a Bachelors degree in teaching English at the Secondary level, and a Certification from Massachusetts General Hospital Language Clinic to provide therapeutic assistance to individuals with a Specific Reading Disability/Dyslexia.

S.B.Bill # 317 Statement of Purpose: “To require any person applying for a remedial reading, remedial language arts or reading consultant endorsement to have completed a course that includes instruction on dyslexia.”

This is a good start, but insufficient. An Amendment to this Bill is necessary in order to properly prepare the teachers that will provide remediation for individuals with dyslexia.

Given the fact that my own training, following graduate work involved 300 hours devoted to learning how to help individuals with dyslexia, I know that “a course including instruction on dyslexia” would fall far short of the goal of helping those with dyslexia learn to read.

In explaining to the Education Committee what I think teachers need to help dyslexic children, I would like to provide some information based on my own training that I hope will explain why the attachment of a single course to the teacher endorsements mentioned in the Bill will only fail dyslexic students further. At present, the language in Bill #317 suggests that teaching dyslexics must be simple so the addition of a course on dyslexia should be enough.

My personal training consisted of 300 hours from the Mass. General Language Clinic. This training gave me the background and techniques I needed to work with hundreds of children, K-12 struggling with a reading disorder. The following gives some idea about the content of this training.

There was the expectation that not only would we learn to work with children, but that we would have the tools and information to understand why the student was having difficulty. For example, there were classes of instruction on the research devoted to the nature of dyslexia, sometimes presented by the researcher him or herself. For example, we learned that a dyslexic individual may have exceptional comprehension of concepts presented orally and also demonstrate good oral vocabulary while at the same time failing to recognize the same vocabulary words in print. We read research that demonstrated the difference in the brains of a dyslexic and a non dyslexic reader. This helped us understand that the dyslexic child was being forced to use an alternate route in order to read – a much slower process than using the phonological route used by others.

We learned that a child with dyslexia doesn't automatically intuit that the alphabet and the sounds represented by the letters are critical to figuring out how to take words apart and to blend them together. While one child sees the word *sit* and then the word *fit*, he concludes that the words are the same but for the initial letter and is able to make that adjustment. The child with dyslexia is unable to segment the first letter and substitute with another; he has trouble with segmenting.

Many more hours were spent on learning about the underlying language aspects of the reading process and spelling as well. There are special techniques that we were taught in order to address some of difficulties that dyslexic children experience on a daily basis.

My training mandated face to face lessons with children known to be dyslexic. We were supervised at every lesson and a critique followed in order to improve on the lessons. We each worked this way with three children three times a week so that we were able to build confidence in the lesson make-up and child's progress.

I would like to say that I only cited some of my own training to make the point that dyslexia is a serious language disorder and requires that the instructor is equipped with the knowledge and tools to help the child. Helping a child to

understand how he learns and why he may be having trouble frees him from the thought process that he can't read or spell because – "I'm stupid" heard too many times to mention.

Far too many schools are allowing partially trained teachers to work with the children thought to be dyslexic. Three things I was told at Mass. General were: "If you don't know what you're doing, don't do anything because you'll cause more damage!" And "If your student says he doesn't know something that you've already covered, you tell him that you must not have taught it to him very well and that you'll do it again – it's never his fault!" And lastly, "You should be able to teach a child to read if you only have a stick and some sand!"

I hope that the committee will agree that a comprehensive curriculum for teachers who will work with reading disabled/dyslexic children is what is needed so that these children are given a chance to unlock the code to our language for reading. Every course in K-12 requires good decoding and comprehension for success. With properly trained teachers, one could expect there to be significant gains in all aspects of a child's academic and social experience.