

Testimony for HB 7254 AN ACT REQUIRING SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS TO COMPLETE A PROGRAM OF STUDY IN EVIDENCE-BASED STRUCTURED LITERACY INTERVENTIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA.

Testimony From:

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Former Committee Member *CT's System of General Supervision and Focus Monitoring* 2004-2012

Dear Education Committee:

This is my written testimony. I will not be testifying at the hearing regarding this Bill. I support Raised HB 7254 and want you to understand why you should too. This year there is an onslaught of Bills regarding Special Education. I have never seen so many and clearly it is a result of the fiscal crisis at the state, the determined unjust Educational Cost Sharing Formula and the cost of SPED. The goal I assume is to reduce the cost of special education on districts and the state. Raised HB 7254 is the most important Bill you can pass to keep the costs of Special Education down. Reading and literacy are the most fundamental skills our schools are supposed to teach. Outplacements are the greatest costs in Special Education and the lack of student literacy is what is behind many costly outplacements.

The largest numbers of students receiving Special Education are there to improve literacy because of a reading disability/ form of Dyslexia. Estimates are up to %80 of SPED students in school, approximately 75% of adjudicated youth and incarcerated adults have Dyslexia and many are still unidentified. Despite progress with previous Dyslexia legislation we have not reached the population of students formally identified with Dyslexia or the ones who have the most severe cases that aren't formally identified. The state and districts have not prepared teachers to address the most costly high incidence hidden disability = Dyslexia. I say hidden because it wasn't until the last Dyslexia Bill passed that a disability category on the IEP was created for Dyslexia. Acknowledging the name/ category was akin to a shining light and coming out of the dark ages. What you may not know is that many other students have Dyslexia but it is not their Primary Disability category checked off so in those cases it is still somewhat hidden. The numbers of students with Dyslexia are much higher than what a district may often count on IEP's.

There are too many Special Education teachers charged with remediating reading who have no training to do so. This Bill will assure that that NEW teachers finally get training in not only the

identification of Dyslexia but more importantly training in how to teach and remediate literacy skills. The teachers that are in the system NOW do not have to get training because of the union created grandfather clause. So what happens is both teachers and students struggle without progress and eventually many of these students then get outplaced. This amounts to the districts essentially paying twice. Current Special Education teachers teaching not trained to teach reading get to keep their job. The district continues to pay them but they also end up paying for outplacements. This is very costly to districts and maybe now you can understand why. Some teachers do get trained but it is voluntary on both the part of the district and the teachers.

It's clear this lack of teacher training in Special Education has led to a crisis because too many schools are failing too many students when it comes to literacy. You can choose not to pass this Bill and finally see that new teachers are prepared or you can continue to hemorrhage money and hurt students. Literacy is undeniably one of the greatest predictors of life long success. This state pays \$400 million dollars for teacher pensions. Isn't it time to hold them accountable for teaching students to read? If not NOW....WHEN will it be time?

Thank you for your commitment and dedication to our Connecticut students. Please show your real commitment to students with Dyslexia and districts and pass HB 7254. When the majority of students can read many of the other proposed Bills will not be necessary because one of the largest systemic dysfunctions will be corrected.

Sincerely,  
Joanna Cooper