

Testimony in favor of HB 7254  
An Act Requiring Special Education Teachers to Complete a Program of Study in Evidence-Based Structured Literacy Interventions for Students with Dyslexia.

Senators Slossberg and Boucher, Representatives Fleischman and Lavielle, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Merrill Gay and I am a member of the New Britain Board of Education. I would like to offer this testimony in favor of HB 7254 An Act Requiring Special Education Teachers to Complete a Program of Study in Evidence-Based Structured Literacy Interventions for Students with Dyslexia. This bill will require pre-service training in evidence based literacy Interventions for students with dyslexia in order to get a special education certification.

Our district in New Britain has spent thousands and thousands of dollars getting teachers trained by Wilson. Unfortunately, we are a poor district, so we don't have any money in our operating budget for this. It's only possible pay for teachers to get Wilson training when we can find grants to pay for it. With 10,000 students in 14 schools we currently have 4 teachers who are Wilson certified. That is the same number we had last year when I testified on a dyslexia bill. We do have 9 more working to complete the Wilson training, but they still have a ways to go.

Three quarter of our students are not proficient in reading. The vast majority of them are not dyslexic. They are poor, live in homes where there aren't any books, started kindergarten with very small vocabularies and many are learning English at school. Interspersed among those 7,500 children who aren't proficient are some students with dyslexia. We are required by IDEA to provide an education appropriate to their disability, but as you can imagine our reading interventionists are pretty overwhelmed and most are not trained in an evidence based method to teach reading to students with dyslexia. We desperately need higher education to step up its game. We need special ed teachers coming out of our colleges who are equipped with the latest knowledge and methods for teaching students with dyslexia. I urge you to pass HB 7254. Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions.