

March 15, 2017

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

I am Sherryl Hauck of New Fairfield, CT. I have testified before the Senate Education committee for the last few years with regards to the recognition and remediation of dyslexia in our CT public schools. I strongly support HB 7254 as it calls for a Program of Study in Dyslexia within higher education. My dyslexic IS the poster child for this legislation! This is written testimony and I will not be testifying. Attached, as well, is my recent letter to Connecticut legislators with regard to 2017 dyslexia legislation.

My 17 year old high school senior was diagnosed as profoundly dyslexic back in February of 2014. She could not read connective language, had the reading fluency of a second grader and the reading comprehension of a fourth grade student. She did not have the ability to sound out words and “read” by memorizing words, a testimony to her amazing compensatory skills. Our Connecticut public school system failed my daughter and school testing (since first grade) never uncovered her learning disabilities. Without doubt, if a special education teacher (or a classroom teacher) knew the signs of dyslexia and really understood the impact of this diverse language disability, my dyslexic would not have graduated high school without the ability to read!

We pulled my daughter out of school the last two months of her senior year and she began the exhaustive journey to learn to read at the age of 17 via the Orton Gillingham approach (a 70+ year old evidenced based structured literacy program) working one-to one with an OG tutor five days per week. Two years later, August 2016, we came full circle! My daughter was re-tested and presently reads on a college level thanks to the positive attitude and extremely hard work she put forth using the evidence based reading interventions that are critically essential to meet the needs of a dyslexic. She attended college this past fall and earned the distinction, named to dean's list.

My daughter is unique because she refused to give up and fought a grueling fight for two years after high school so she could learn to read while her peers attended college. A learning disability that goes unnoticed sets the stage for at risk behaviors and depression in our young. A teacher educated about dyslexia can prevent years of struggle, failure and the thinking for dyslexic students that I'm just not smart enough.

My profoundly dyslexic daughter and our family STAND AS WITNESS to the positive outcome and progress that is made through remediation via a scientific, multi sensory approach to reading. WE ARE WITNESS to the fact that a teacher educated about dyslexia can prevent years of struggle for a student who learns differently. Teacher knowledge about dyslexia, preparation, and supervised practicum hours are vital! Early intervention and an one-to-one evidence based multi sensory approach to reading for a dyslexic is urgent! ALL educators need to be DYSLEXIA educated!

Sherryl Hauck, New Fairfield, CT/Attachment

A LETTER TO CONNECTICUT LEGISLATORS - DYSLEXIA LEGISLATION 2017

My daughter was a high school senior in February of 2014 when we learned she was profoundly dyslexic. Three outside experts conferred scores that ranked her in the 1st percentile and lower for reading and mathematics. Her profile was labeled by one expert as “a crisis, lethal and profound.” She graduated with her fellow classmates in June 2014 with the reading fluency (speed) of a second grader and the reading comprehension of a fourth grader.

The diagnosis of Dyslexia - in 12th grade - was a painful reality given her teachers noticed classroom struggles dating back to first grade. Years worth of parent/teacher meetings and in-school testing never found our daughter to be learning disabled and she never qualified for special education. My husband and I trusted the school professionals who maintained our daughter was a model student and that academic struggles were due to focus issues, a medical diagnosis she had since elementary school. Only after failing the middle school curriculum in 6th grade was she finally given the classification of “Other Health Impaired/ADHD-Inattentive” (80% of dyslexics are also ADHD.) An IEP accommodated her with extra time and classroom notes and our daughter was able to achieve A’s & B’s throughout high school, though getting through school work was painfully slow. Standardized testing, and our school district’s emphasis of “teaching to the test,” established our daughter was a proficient reader, however, SAT scores proved an accurate reality.

ALL the early warning signs for dyslexia were clearly present for our little girl who couldn’t rhyme or remember her spelling vocabulary and she silently suffered to learn in the classroom. My husband and I did not know the symptoms of this diverse language disability that effects one in five. We were devastated to learn that our high school senior could not sound out words but memorized words “to read.” Decoding language was an agonizing struggle and words had little meaning. Shocking too is the fact that her late diagnosis was dismissed by our affluent, educated school district.

In crisis mode, our daughter began intensive remediation with the Orton Gillingham (OG) approach and worked one to one with an OG tutor five days per week, two hours per day throughout the spring and summer months of her high school senior year. OG’s multisensory teaching uses the seeing, hearing, feeling and motion pathways of the brain in order to learn the sounds of language — and at 17 years old, she began to learn the sounds of language for the very first time.

Though we began remediation to close an incomprehensible ten year reading gap before our daughter entered college in the fall of 2014, her freshman year proved incredibly hard. After much emotion and discernment, our daughter completed her first year of college, took a gap year and continued intensive work with her OG tutor, an exhausting endeavor. It was her strong desire for success and her will to never give up that pushed her to learn when it was easier to just give up. At the end of summer 2016, after two years tutored in The OG Approach, our now 20 year old is reading at a college level!!!

Fast forward to today, almost three years after her dyslexia diagnosis, our daughter has begun her second semester as a college sophomore and made the distinction of Deans List last fall. We are witness that a scientific, multisensory approach to reading is essential for a dyslexic. We are witness that a teacher educated about dyslexia can prevent years of struggle for a child who learns differently. Early intervention, teacher knowledge and an one-to-one evidence based multisensory approach to reading is essential for all dyslexics!

Sherryl Hauck for Decoding Dyslexia Connecticut
January 18, 2017