

To:
CT Education Committee

Re: House Bill 7254
An Act Requiring Special Education Teachers to Complete a Program of Study in Evidence-Based Structured Literacy Interventions for Students with Dyslexia.

My name is Jean Sawicki and I live in Mansfield Center, Connecticut.

I support HB 7254 regarding the requirement for Special Education Teachers to complete a program of study that addresses the type of instruction that will benefit students with Dyslexia.

I have provided services for those with Dyslexia for over 25 years in schools and in a private practice. Although I have a Master's Degree in Education with a focus on Learning Disabilities and majored in English and Secondary Education while in college, I was totally unprepared to help students with Dyslexia.

After enrolling in a program at Massachusetts General Hospital in their Reading Disability Unit, I discovered that Dyslexia was a disorder that required specialized training and a deep understanding of the underlying causes of this disorder. Although Dyslexia has a profoundly negative effect on one's reading, writing, and spelling, the individual with Dyslexia experiences effects that are more broadly assigned to him/her. Issues of direction such as left or right are widely known, but teachers and others may not realize the problem caused by *directional words* such as former, latter, beyond, and by *sequencing activities* such as the months of the year, the order of the alphabet, telling time from an analogue clock, or tying one's shoes. All of these confusions can have a long-lasting negative impact on the individual if he or she does not receive, not only the academic therapy required for learning to read, but also the emotional therapy that helps the individual understand the nature of his or her Dyslexia to rid them of the overarching feeling they have of being "stupid."

We cannot expect normally-educated Special Ed teachers to have the expertise needed to deal successfully with a child's Dyslexia. They cannot buy the books and expect to train themselves; imagine a brain surgeon getting his knowledge and direction from a book or on-line courses. My own training involved 800 hours of combined lectures and working with three children who had been diagnosed with Dyslexia. I had a supervisor that sat in on every lesson I prepared and delivered, and who provided feedback each time to help me construct better lessons and better explanations for these students.

I have known children with Dyslexia who had been in reading programs with teachers who were not properly trained to help them. One child said that he'd "had reading help for six years and still couldn't read" which was due to poor instruction. This situation was not only sad, but unnecessary.

I would suggest that this Committee invite representatives from well-know successful programs for Dyslexics, all of which are based on the Orton-Gillingham philosophy and method. Dr. Samuel Orton and educator Anna Gillingham were pioneers in realizing that certain intelligent children were unable to decipher the written word when taught in the normal manner. They found a way to engage all the senses for these children to understand what other children easily intuited regarding the makeup of a word – researchers found that our speech sounds are represented in print by letters. Not a

problem for many to grasp, but an enigma for a child with Dyslexia. This kind of understanding and knowledge is what benefits someone with Dyslexia and this requires very special training for his or her teachers.

Please do not allow children with Dyslexia to be given improper instruction; it will only seal their early beliefs that they must be “stupid.” Connecticut can do better. New Jersey, Texas, and North Carolina are a few of the states that understand how to instruct these children and so can we.

Special Education Teachers would become certified to teach children with Dyslexia if they were given an opportunity to take courses offered at the Learning House in Guilford, run by Orton-Gillingham Fellow, Susan Santora. There are a series of workshops to take – not just a one week introductory course –toward reaching certified status. This would not involve local colleges and universities at this point but would move toward the goal of preparing many teachers to work with children with Dyslexia. I am available if there are questions that I could answer.

Thank you,
Jean Sawicki