

March 15, 2017

Ladies and Gentleman,

My name is Linda Sceles-Straubel; I live in Darien, Connecticut. This is my testimony for the support of HB 7254 and I will not be testifying at the hearing. As a mother, aunt and passionate advocate for children with dyslexia, I support the House Bill 7254, An Act Requiring Special Education Teachers to Complete a Program of Study in Evidence-Base Structured Literacy Intervention for Students with Dyslexia. The focus of all educational legislation should always be on providing high quality education for all of our students. A special education teacher's secondary /or post graduate education along with their keen understanding of evidence-based structured literacy intervention should be the starting point for all special education teachers entering into a public or private academic career because it is the teachers knowledge & skill , which will nurture our students ultimate success. Our state should never consider compromising professional teaching standards to allow budgets gaps to be filled with unqualified (less expensive) teachers or acquiesce to pressure that new teachers may be burdened by excess teaching requirements. CT parents simply want special education teachers to have the professional knowledge and training needed to teach their children with Dyslexia ...with no excuses.

A few years ago, I attended a program sponsored by the CT Dyslexia Society on the topic of special education and Common Core. During the afternoon breakout session, I watched as special education teachers and reading specialists in the audience had a loud debate from across the ballroom on who was best able to teach students with dyslexia because neither educational group felt the other had the proper background. It was clear that very few educators in the room that day knew how best to work with children with dyslexia. As appalling as this debate was, it did not surprise me or the special education attorney sitting beside me, because both of us had heard these same issues discussed before with both parents and educators over the years. It was hard hearing educators admitting how unprepared they felt out in the open. Parents are frustrated and do not want to continue fighting local school districts which have low expectations for dyslexic students, simply because the special education teachers do not have the necessary skills to teach their children. If the educators themselves feel they do not have the backgrounds, we must advocate for our educational communities by supporting this bill requiring teachers learn/develop the tools they need to be successful. The perception of excellent educational programs in CT is why parents move to our beautiful state, all for our excellent public and private educational opportunities. After all, for parents it is always about our children and their future.

Our teacher colleges and university simply have not prepared teachers with the necessary skills needed to meet the challenges of working with children with language-based disabilities. Only recently has CT received IDA knowledgement for two university programs. Parents, school districts and our state government must demand a change to existing programs. I have seen the difference teachers who are properly trained can have on our children and it is frankly remarkable. Children who have attended private schools such as The Windward School or Eagle Hill and even students attending remedial tutoring at Linda Moodbell or Learning House or Literacy How, have made remarkable progress with evidenced based trained teachers and tutors.

We do not have to settle for well-intentioned educators who simply do not have the training or skill sets to work with our students. We do not want tenured special education teachers who do not have the necessary training to fulfill their responsibilities and instead blame the lack of success on the students. Parents are tired of having to fight for appropriate services and transparent progress monitoring for their children. Many local districts further complicated the issue by choosing to implement methodologies for teaching general education Language Arts such as the readers/writers workshop model, which does not directly instruct students in reading or writing, leaving children with dyslexia as well as general education students who simply need direct language instruction at a significant disadvantage. We need well-trained teachers trained in evidence-based structured literacy.

I support House Bill 7254, which calls for a "Program of Study" in dyslexia for special educators with institutes of higher education. I support teacher preparation for special educators with evidence-based structured literacy and supervised practicing hours. I support special Ed. Teachers receiving pre- service dyslexia training before they graduate and reach our local districts. Lawyers, accountants, doctors, insurance representatives, even banking/investment professionals all take licensing examinations and have required continuing education in their specific disciplines before they can start their careers and advance. We should expect the thorough training process for our special education teachers working with our most vulnerable children. I support this bill and hope CT continues to support the successful educational future of special education students with Dyslexia.

Thank you for your consideration.

Linda Sceles-Straubel  
Darien, CT