

To the Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Erin Wood and I live in Southington, CT. I **fully support 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 a parent of two dyslexic boys who **failed to learn how to read in the public education system** for a collective total of 10 years. We made the choice to have our boys educated in a private school that has fully trained special education teachers, who specialize in dyslexia. Our journey was a very hard and unnecessary one.

My sons were given special education in the public school after many years of the school failing to recognize their learning differences. When my oldest son was finally identified for services in special education, he was given a new special education teacher, right out of college. She was not trained in dyslexia, nor had she been trained in the evidence-based, structured literacy program she was using with my son – The Wilson program. We were told she would “follow the manual.” As you might guess, my son made no progress and his self-esteem plummeted. We transferred to a school with a teacher that was trained in the Wilson reading program and in dyslexia. My oldest son was privileged to work with this teacher. In the one year he worked with this TRAINED educator, he made growth. Unfortunately, that teacher left after one year. Again, my son was given a special education teacher that had little to no training in dyslexia or structured literacy interventions. She was trained by observing another teacher. His reading growth came to a halt and he continued to fail for the next school year, making no growth in reading.

My younger son, unfortunately, never had the privilege of working with a trained special education teacher. The teacher that was assigned to him had been trained by observing another teacher trained in dyslexia and had taken the basic three day introductory course in the Wilson reading program. We all know that this “train one teacher and they will train the rest” approach to teacher training is not effective. My youngest son never made very much progress in reading. He left public school in fourth grade reading at an end of kindergarten reading level!

As you know, we placed our sons in a private school. All the teachers are special educators and all are trained in evidence based, structured literacy. My sons aren’t pulled out of classes for special education at all. Their self-esteem has grown and they have made tremendous progress in all academic areas. My oldest son completed one year at this school. He entered sixth grade at a second grade reading level. He made over **two years of growth** in one school year in reading and writing. His teachers understand how he learns and know how to implement his reading instruction. My youngest son is half way through his first year in his new school. He is happy, well-adjusted and most importantly, picking up books and reading them for the first time in his life! He reports that he loves his new school because the teachers “make things easy to understand and they know how to teach him.”

One in five children are dyslexic. The majority of our special education population is dyslexic. Special educators are the major line of defense in identifying and remediating dyslexia. Not only is it unfair to our children that teachers do not have the appropriate training in evidence based, structured literacy, it is also unfair to our special educators. Currently, public schools are setting them up to fail. In my

experience, most of these teachers crave the knowledge necessary to help their students. Most special educators are frustrated that they haven't been given the knowledge and training in dyslexia. HB7254 aligns teacher preparation for special educators with evidence based structured literacy, along with requirements for supervised practicum hours, which is critical. This legislation will allow teachers to receive dyslexia training as pre-service teacher candidates, before they graduate and reach our local school districts. If this legislation is implemented, the critical needs of students with dyslexia will be met. Parents, like myself, will not have to sacrifice their money and their time by putting students in private programs.

I urge you to pass HB 7254. Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.

Sincerely,

Erin Wood