

**Testimony of Margie Gillis, Ed.D.
President, Literacy How, Inc. and Research Affiliate, Haskins Laboratories**

**HB 6620, An Act Concerning the Right to Read and Addressing the Opportunity Gaps and Equity
in Public Schools
March 16, 2021**

Co-Chairs, Mr. Sanchez and Mr. McCrory and Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Margie Gillis and I am here to provide testimony as an enthusiastic supporter of HB6620. As the President of *Literacy How* and a member of the CT Literacy Model team, I have seen first-hand how impactful research and evidence-based instruction is. Without it, districts across our state present data that exemplify the opportunity gaps with high percentages of children reading below proficient (i.e., grade) level.

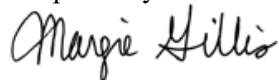
HB 6620 will establish the Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success and coordinate efforts to address the opportunity gaps and equity in our public schools. The bill will require all districts to demonstrate the use of reading curricula and screening assessments that are based on the science of reading – that is, “an interdisciplinary body of *scientifically-based research* about reading and issues related to reading and writing. This research has culminated in a preponderance of evidence to inform how proficient reading and writing develop; why some have difficulty; and how we can most effectively assess and teach and, therefore, improve student outcomes through prevention of and intervention for reading difficulties” (The Reading League, 2021).

For the past 20 years, our coaches have worked with teachers in their classrooms so that they learn how to apply research and evidence-based reading methods to ensure that children learn to read well. A frequent comment from these teachers is that they didn’t learn what we’re modeling for them in their teacher preparation programs. And, in fact, some have openly wept thinking about the children that failed to learn to read in their classrooms as a result of what their professors failed to teach them. I assure you that *no* teacher wants to carry that burden. We know the cost to the child.

As members of the state’s Education Committee, you recognize the importance of prevention and early intervention. Chairman McCrory, you know first-hand what happens when students pass from elementary school to middle school without the requisite reading and writing skills. They cannot access the disciplinary knowledge and demonstrate that knowledge in their written expression. As a result, the gap widens and many of these students, though intelligent and capable, lose their motivation to learn and drop out of school. The economic and moral costs are huge and incontrovertible – children who can’t read well never reach their full potential. Illiteracy is common among both inmates and the unemployed. No wonder Connecticut’s percentage of incarcerated juveniles is one of the highest in the country!

Rather than maintaining the status quo and allowing the opportunity gaps to persist, let’s gather our political will and distinguish ourselves as a state that puts children at the center of our educational system. Their lives depend on us!

Respectfully submitted,



Margie B. Gillis, Ed.D.
President, Literacy How, Inc.