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In Support of H.B. No. 6620: 'An Act Concerning The Right To Read And Addressing Opportunity Gaps And Equity In Public Schools.'

Before the Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly
Public Hearing | March 17, 2021

Co-Chairs McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, Vice-Chairs Daugherty Abrams and Barry, and members of the Education Committee, my name is Laura Heneghan and I live in New Fairfield, CT. I am a both a parent of a child with language based learning difficulties and a special education attorney for families.

I want to express my **strong support for H.B. No. 6620**: 'An Act Concerning The Right To Read And Addressing Opportunity Gaps And Equity In Public Schools,' and urge you to vote in favor of this important legislation.

This legislation is important to me because I believe every student has the Right To Read, and there's a right way to teach them. I also have personal experience with a child who struggles reading and how that crushes confidence in learning and a love of reading. I also see everyday the families who struggle because their child can't read at grade level. This results in not only falling behind but significant anxiety.

As we know, Connecticut is facing an education and literacy crisis. Pre-pandemic, nearly half of Connecticut's third grade public school students were not meeting grade-level expectations in reading. Connecticut also has wide gaps in reading attainment by race, reflecting an ongoing civil rights injustice. The pandemic has further exacerbated this crisis, causing significant learning disruption and loss, as recent studies have shown.

We also know the stakes couldn't be higher. A student's ability to read is a critical predictor of educational and lifelong success. It's also critical to addressing the opportunity gap and racial equity in our schools and society at-large. By the 3rd grade, students must transition from learning to read to reading to learn. Without those skills, the rest of the K-12 curriculum will not be fully accessible to them and they can fall increasingly behind. Further, we know today's education crisis is tomorrow's economic crisis, and CT faces significant challenges with

workforce development and equitable employment opportunities. Poor reading skills are regularly linked to higher dropout rates, poverty and even incarceration.

This bill will help to change that by advancing a proven, statewide, comprehensive approach to effective and equitable literacy instruction for every classroom in Connecticut.

This legislation, if passed, promises to build on the success of Connecticut's homegrown, research-based model for reading instruction **–** formerly known as the Connecticut K-3 Literacy Initiative (CK3LI) and now called the Connecticut Literacy Model – which utilizes the *science of reading*. Specifically, this legislation would: 1) Provide effective and equitable reading instruction in every classroom, 2) Address systemic racial injustice by closing the literacy opportunity gap and 3) Enhance CT's workforce development efforts, ensuring our students and state emerge from this pandemic stronger than ever.

Every classroom in Connecticut stands to benefit greatly from this legislation. For these reasons, I ask that you vote in favor of H.B. No. 6620.

Thank you for your time and consideration.