

Testimony in **opposition** to: H.B. No. 6620 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO READ AND ADDRESSING OPPORTUNITY GAPS AND EQUITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

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Good morning members and thank you for your service. Reading through the responses you have already received in opposition to the poorly named “Right to Read” bill, I do not seek here to further point out the research, lived experience, and professional understanding that contradicts the claims of (again poorly named) science of reading folks. The research is vast and complicated and incomplete and contradictory when it comes to what works in teaching reading to your people. At the very least the research you have been offered should cause us all to pause and realize that we have more to learn before we enact legislature that dictates how teachers will teach all kids.

I do not want to resend research to you. Instead, I hope to persuade you with common sense. Of course both “sides” of this debate around reading have much to learn from each other. As someone who works towards reading independence, power and engagement, I know that explicit phonics teaching is essential. But so is independent reading of real books that kids love. We need both, in a balance, responsive to the kids in front of us. The legislation proposed tilts the scales fully in one direction, and if enacted, many kids will topple off.

I work in literacy education K-12. I have written three books for teachers on literacy, and I work closely with teachers and districts across the country. I am also a parent of a first grader and a pre-schooler. Watching children learn to read, as opposed to engaging in a research project that looks for dubious gains in a select group of kids that are targeted with new instruction, shows you that reading is part science and part art, with a whole bunch of humanity thrown in. You need the phonics, but you also need the comprehension. Without one the other is nonsense and does not connect to the reason anyone reads in the first place – because we like it.

If this bill passes, instead kids will not have adequate opportunities to read books they love. They will not engage with texts and talk about texts and figure out how words are weird (especially in English) as much as they need to in order to become not robotic repeaters of words but readers.

Teachers should absolutely get better professional development around phonics instruction. But know that the research that claims this is all they need is as flawed as any research study about reading. Teachers must above all else be given the training and support to make informed, responsive decisions about their students and what they need. They do not need programs and textbooks and apps. We tried that. We tried phonics only instruction in fact. It did not work.

The future of reading instruction must be a balance between phonics, comprehension, engagement, and community. This bill prevents that from happening.

