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GENERAL ASSEMBLY
HOUSE**

**PROCEEDINGS
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THE CLERK:

House Bill 5408 as amended by House "A".

Total number voting 146

Necessary for passage 74

Those voting Yea 138

Those voting Nay 8

Those absent and not voting 5

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

The bill as amended passes. The Chamber will
stand at ease.

(Chamber at ease.)

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Will the House please come back to order.

Will the Clerk please call Calendar 285.

THE CLERK:

House Calendar 285 on page 35, favorable report
of the joint standing committee on Appropriations,
Substitute House Bill 5562, AN ACT CONCERNING SPECIAL
EDUCATION.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

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The distinguished chairman of the Education Committee, Representative Fleischmann, you have the floor, sir.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Aresimowicz.

REP. ARESIMOWICZ (30th):

Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move we suspend our rules for immediate consideration of Calendar Number 285.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Seeing no objection, so ordered. The rules are suspended for the consideration of the aforementioned Calendar 285.

With that, Mr. Chairman, if you would proceed.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With that motion now accepted by the Chamber, I would move acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

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The question is on acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

Will you remark, sir?

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. The bill that's now before us addresses a challenge that the Education Committee identified regarding dyslexia. And it would address that by adding dyslexia to the special education individualized education program form, IEP form. And also ensuring that instruction in dyslexia be added to teacher preparation programs held here in the State of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, the Clerk is in possession of an amendment, LCO Number 5194. I ask that the Clerk please call and I be given permission to summarize.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Will the Clerk please call LCO 5194 which will be designated House Amendment "A".

THE CLERK:

House Amendment "A", LCO 5194, introduced by Speaker Sharkey, et al.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

The gentleman has sought leave of the Chamber to summarize. Is there objection? Seeing none, you may proceed with summarization, sir.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So this LCO number reflects the contents of what had previously been Senate Bill Number 25 and Senate Bill Number 26 earlier in this session. The first is AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD and the latter AN ACT EXPANDING EARLY CHILDHOOD OPPORTUNITIES. In essence what this does is continues work that got started last year creating an Office of Early Childhood to take the different silos that we have separating early childhood programs and bring them together under a single office and a single commissioner to ensure that we have collaboration with our local and regional early childhood councils, that we have coordinated information system and quality rating system, that we have a school readiness program that has proper staff qualifications, and that we allow for expansion of 1,020 school readiness slots in primary and competitive school districts plus alliance districts. I move adoption.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

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The question before the Chamber is adoption of House Amendment "A"? Will you remark?

Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First, commenting on the first bill that -- that was raised and then amended with this amendment. The dyslexia bill is a good bill that we heard. This section that was just brought up as the amendment, the Office of Early Childhood had -- essentially second year of its iteration, very, very good piece of legislation, went through a process that we all respect. Again takes multiple departments like the Department of Social Services, Care for Kids, the Department of Education, School Readiness and Head Start. Department of Public Health licensure and regulation now will be under this department, boards of regents which is a charts of course program.

This bill finishes off what was an executive order mid last summer, has already hired their going to be now the commissioner by this bill, and I also urge passage.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

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Thank you, sir.

Would you care to remark further on House
Amendment "A"?

Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA (101st):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, it's exciting news that we're able to put all these great bills together. I think a lot of us in the Chamber have waited a long time with the early education part as the chairman of Education said. We talked about this last year, we weren't able to do it, and I'm glad to see it back. I want just to speak for a couple of minutes on the dyslexia part -- portion of this bill. You know, I know the bill has a -- I know the bill has a lot in it and it has the -- name was a bill concerning special education. But in my district, we call this Joey's Bill.

And this was a young man from one of my towns that came up to testify as did his mother. And many of us sat there for six hours, eight hours actually, and six hours listening to family after family, child after child talk about their experience with dyslexia. And I think it was news for a lot of us that 15 to 20 percent of our schoolchildren have this -- have this

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issue. It's a spectrum. And it's -- I think it was amazing to a lot of us that have lived here our whole lives that this isn't something we've addressed. So I think it's great in this bill that we are.

I just wanted to share with you a couple things Joey said to us that day. He -- this young man wasn't diagnosed until he was in seventh grade. He now is in automotive school doing well, but he's still behind in his reading and everything because he was diagnosed so late. And I think the intention of this part of the bill is not only diagnosis but intervention and education and doing something. And also there's a part of the bill that will educate, I'm sorry, I keep saying bill, well, this is --

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Kokoruda, I'm sorry. We are on House Amendment "A" which is not the bill.

REP. KOKORUDA (101st):

Oh, not the dyslexia part of the bill. I'm sorry. I'll talk later. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

All right. I'm sorry. Thank you. Thank you, madam.

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Would you care to remark further on Senate
Amendment "A"? Senate Amendment "A"?

Representative Lavielle. I'm sorry, House
Amendment "A". This is on the amendment.

REP. LAVIELLE (143rd):

Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Good morning, madam.

REP. LAVIELLE (143rd):

Very, very quickly on the amendment. Just I'm
glad to see that the bill that many of us worked on
and supported last year is substantially here before
us, addresses that vital part of education which is
early education. If you don't address that, it's very
difficult to address the rest of someone's educational
career. And also brings together all the other
important components of dealing with early childhood
issues. So I'm pleased to see that as part of this
bill and I will stop my remarks there to comment
further on the bill after. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Thank you, madam.

Would you care to remark? Would you care to
remark further on House Amendment "A"?

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If not, let me try your minds, all those in favor of House "A" please signify by saying aye.

REPRESENTATIVES:

Aye.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Those opposed, nay.

The ayes have it. The amendment is adopted.

Would you care to remark? Would you care to remark further on the bill as amended?

Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA (101st):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I have it right this time. Sorry about that. I started to say we have this young man in my district, he was -- he's in automotive school now but at seventh grade was finally diagnosed. He was at Connecticut Boys his whole life and we missed it. And I just wanted to read a couple things he said to us. He said I see things mechanically. Ask me to read an English textbook and write a paper on it, and I'll just give you a blank stare. But tell me to open the hood of a care and tear down the engine, now that's easy. Words on a page look like gibberish, they bounce around in my head, and I can't always make out what they are. But

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when I look at an engine, I can see how not only what you see, I see the internal parts are working together, gas and air flow through the engine.

This is a young man who would be a success who came up to testify. I think what he said was he didn't want other children in our -- in our state to go through that. And I think the part that we have that's professional training for our newest teachers to help them identify this early and to teach them what to do about it. We talked a couple years ago about third grade reading scores, and I don't ever remember this being part of the conversation and it should have been. But now it is and I stand in support of this bill, the whole bill, and the amended portion of the bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Thank you, madam.

Would you care to remark further on the bill as amended?

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Clerk is in possession of an amendment, LCO Number 5134. I

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ask the Clerk please call and I be given permission to summarize.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Will the Clerk please call LCO 5135 which will be designated House Amendment "B".

THE CLERK:

House Amendment "B", LCO 5134, introduced by Representative Fleischmann, et al.

SPEAKER SHARKEY: .

The gentleman has sought leave of the Chamber to summarize. Is there objection? Is there objection? Seeing none, you may proceed with summarization, sir.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This very simple amendment before us replaces the word appropriate with the term evidence-based and thereby takes a subjective term and replaces it with an objective one that is supported by all of the advocates who came before. I move adoption.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

The question before the Chamber is adoption of House Amendment "B".

Will you remark on House "B"?

Representative Ackert.

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REP. ACKERT (8th):

Yes, Mr. Speaker. As the good chair just -- this cleans it up, makes it a better amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I urge passage.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Thank you, sir.

Would you care to remark further on House "B"?

If not, let me try your minds. All those in favor of House Amendment "B", please signify by saying aye.

REPRESENTATIVES:

Aye.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Those opposed, nay.

The ayes have it. The amendment is adopted.

Would you care to remark further on the bill as amended? Would you care to remark further on the bill as amended?

Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE (143rd):

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The -- the dyslexia portion of this bill is extremely important. I think we all realized just how important it was when we -- when we attended the public hearing as a

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Committee and saw I think nearly 100 people who came in to testify. And I must say that each testimony was more moving than the last. It reminded me of a story that one of my constituents from Wilton has told me. He mentors a young man who is middle school in one of our large cities. And the young man is dyslexic. He has not been properly diagnosed by the school but only by an outside counselor and advisor.

And when -- although he's having terribly difficulties in school, when my constituent asked why he wasn't -- his grades weren't reflecting the difficulties, they said, well, you know, he's not graded the way the others are. We grade him on whether he shows up, on whether he's nice, on whether he behaves himself because we know he's not capable of the work. And I think that all of the things that this bill does will cease this exclusion that students have felt for so long. They will make it so much easier for people to realize how they function. It will solve not only problems of reading and other types of learning, but also self esteem. I think it's -- it is a highly necessary step. I am so glad that we're taking it and we've realized how necessary it is. I'm very proud to support the bill and pleased

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that it's come before us and I urge everyone else to support it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Thank you, madam.

Would you care to remark further? Would you care to remark further on the bill as amended?

Representative Becker.

REP. BECKER (19th):

Thank you -- thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, doesn't every parent want his child to be excited about going to school? Doesn't every parent want his child to be excited to learn? Doesn't every parent want his child to reach that child's full potential? Without early diagnosis, a child with dyslexia can fall behind his peers, develop anxiety, learn to hate school, and give up. Our children should not have to needlessly suffer struggling in school and losing self esteem.

This bill is about early intervention, teacher training to recognize dyslexia at its earliest stage. Early intervention is the key. The earlier a child is diagnosed with dyslexia, the easier it is for the child to overcome it. Let's give children with dyslexia the same chance to succeed as every other

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child. Mr. Speaker, let's pass this bill. And I want to thank the Education Committee, particularly my good friend and chairman, Andrew Fleischmann, for moving this bill along and I urge my colleagues to pass it. Thank you.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Thank you, sir.

Would you care to remark further on the bill as amended?

Representative Cook.

REP. COOK (65th):

Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Good morning, madam.

REP. COOK (65th):

I just wanted to take a few minutes and thank the parents and the advocates that have been fighting for those children who can't fight for themselves, to help make such an important piece of their life that is affecting their educational system better. And our job as Legislators is to ensure that we represent everybody. And I think that this starts recognizing something that has been missed and dismissed for so

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long. So thank you all very much and I urge
everybody's support.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Thank you, madam.

Would you care to remark? Would you care to
remark further on the bill as amended?

If not, staff and guests to the well of the
House, members take your seats, the machine will be
open.

THE CLERK:

The House of Representative is voting by roll.

The House of Representatives is voting by roll. Will
members please return to the Chamber immediately.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Have all members voted? Have all members voted?
Will the members please check the board to make sure
your vote is properly cast. If all the members have
voted, the machine will be locked and the Clerk will
take a tally.

Will the Clerk please announce the tally.

THE CLERK:

House Bill 5562 as amended by House "A" and "B".

Total number voting 142

Necessary for passage 72

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Those voting Yea	142
Those voting Nay	0
Those absent and not voting	9

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

The bill as amended passes.

Will the Clerk please call Calendar 479.

THE CLERK:

House Calendar 479, page 28, favorable report of the joint standing committee on Appropriations, Substitute Senate Bill 25, AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you -- thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

The question is on acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

Will you remark, sir?

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Yes, Mr. Speaker. The subject and substance of this bill obviously should feel familiar since it

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SENATOR LOONEY:

And, Madam President, the third item appearing back on the first page of Senate Agenda Number 1 is House Bill Number 5559. Would ask for suspension that that item might be taken up as the third order of the day.

THE CHAIR:

So ordered, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you.

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

Substitute for House Bill Number 5562, AN ACT
CONCERNING SPECIAL EDUCATION.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Stillman, good evening, Ma'am.

SENATOR STILLMAN:

Good evening, Madam President, how are you today?

THE CHAIR:

It is still today?

SENATOR STILLMAN:

Yeah I know it's still today. (Inaudible).

THE CHAIR:

Please proceed, Ma'am.

SENATOR STILLMAN:

Yes, thank you very much.

I move the Joint Committee's favorable report and passage of the bill in concurrence with the House.

THE CHAIR:

Motion is on acceptance and passage.

Will you remark, Ma'am?

SENATOR STILLMAN:

Yes, thank you, Madam President.

The bill that is before us was acted upon last night in the House. The topics are familiar to this Chamber because we already acted on the topics in the next -- in this bill and the one that will follow.

But this particular bill does address a new issue in the first -- in the first few sections and the rest of the bill involves the Office of Early Childhood. The beginning of the bill, in Sections 1 and 2, is really a very important bill in terms of special education needs in the state.

It's requiring the State Department of Education to add dyslexia to the individual education program form which when a child is in a special education program federal law requires that there is an IEP form that the planning and placement team uses to provide special education and related services to those special education students.

This addition to the form to identify children who have dyslexia conforms to the federal ID definition of special learning disability. And the second part, which is Section 2, is also extremely important because we expect our teachers to be prepared to identify and introduce the appropriate interventions for students with dyslexia.

And the rest of the bill goes into what was Senate Bill 25 when it was before this Chamber and addresses

the establishment of the Office of Early Childhood. It also expands the School Readiness Program and -- and creates those grants for the towns to create more slots for school readiness and I urge passage of the bill.

THE CHAIR:

Will you remark? Will you remark? Senate Boucher, good evening, Ma'am.

SENATOR BOUCHER:

Good evening, Madam President. It's good to be with you this -- this fine day.

I rise to support the bill before us. It was passed by the House and was well explained by the Chair -- distinguished Chair of our Education Committee. As was mentioned, the issue of dyslexia is one of -- of great concern to so many people including our educational community and, although there are some that may have felt that we already cover that in our special education laws and -- and -- but we felt that it was significant enough for it to be highlighted so that it -- it received a little bit more attention, a little bit more coverage certainly, not just as a designated checkoff point on our -- on our forms, but also in the teacher preparation programs because there was enough there that could certainly be identified in many other disciplines that are covered and so it is a good addition to this bill.

And, as was mentioned, we thoroughly also vetted the rest of the early childhood portion of that bill that this Chamber has supported and passed just recently. So I stand in support of this bill before us.

Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator Boucher.

Will you remark? Senator Osten.

SENATOR OSTEN:

Good evening, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Good evening, Ma'am.

SENATOR OSTEN:

Thank you very much.

I also rise in support of this bill, in particular the two sections that are referring to dyslexia. A constituent of mine that I met at a local restaurant in Hebron, Connecticut came to me and said I have a huge problem and I have many friends and many other parents who are having the same problem that dyslexia is not being recognized as well as it should be.

I followed up with her. I met her around the state. I went to West Hartford to a seminar that she put on and in New Britain and met hundreds of families whose children had dyslexia who were having problems with it not being identified correctly and having a hard time getting the help that they needed.

I brought this issue to the Co-Chairs of Education and the Ranking Members and I was excited and thrilled that they were able to include it in this year's legislation and I really want to thank them very much for their leadership, both of them here, and in the House.

This -- this is a -- a needed piece of legislation. It's -- and I -- and I would be remiss if I didn't mention my constituent's name, Allison Quirion. She came -- she came here and testified. She was a great grass roots leader. She worked with many people across the state and I -- I think that she did a tremendous job. She was actually here until one o'clock last night when it was passed by the House and I -- I commend her for bringing this issue and I'm honored to have been able to support her in her endeavor and I want to thank -- and I would encourage all my colleagues to, in the Circle, to pass and support this piece of legislation.

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SENATE

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Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

Will you remark? Will you remark?

If not, Senator Stillman.

SENATOR STILLMAN:

Thank -- thank you, Madam President.

And just in -- in closing I would just like to say the dyslexia portion of this bill we had one of the largest public hearings we've ever had in the Education Committee and the outpouring of need was very obvious so I'm delighted this is here before us tonight.

If there isn't any objection, I would like to ask that it be placed on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Seeing no objection, so ordered.

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

House -- I'm sorry, Senate Bill Number 25, AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD. It's amended by Senate "A".

THE CHAIR:

Will you remark? Senator Stillman.

SENATOR STILLMAN:

Thank you, Madam President.

Yes this is a familiar -- I move Joint Committee's favorable report and passage of the bill in concurrence with the House.

cah/gbr
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Mr. Clerk, will you please call the tally.

THE CLERK:

House Bill Number 5596.

Total Number Voting		36
Necessary for Adoption	19	
Those voting Yea		21
Those voting Nay		15
Absent not voting		0

THE CHAIR:

The budget is passed -- the bill is passed.

Will you remark? Will you remark? Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Madam President.

At this point we call for a -- a vote on our Consent Calendar from items earlier today.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk, will read the -- the bills on the Consent Calendar please.

MR. CLERK:

We have House Bill 5562 and House Bill 5559.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you.

Mr. Clerk, will you call for a roll call vote and the machine will be open.

THE CLERK:

Immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate.
Roll call on the Consent Calendar has been ordered in the Senate.

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THE CHAIR:

If all members have voted, all members have voted, the machine will be closed.

Mr. Clerk, will you give the tally.

THE CLERK:

On today's Consent Calendar.

Total Number Voting	36
Necessary for Adoption	19
Those voting Yea	36
Those voting Nay	0
Absent not voting	0

THE CHAIR:

The Consent Calendar has passed.

Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, I believe the Clerk is in possession of Senate Agenda Number 3.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

I do have Senate Agenda Number 3, dated Saturday, May 3, 2014. It's been copied and is on Senators' desks.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Madam President.

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what you have to share with us today. Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Also, the Capitol Police have asked me to inform those of you who haven't found a seat, who may be standing and blocking the exits, that we have a rollover room today. It is 1C, as in "children," so if you wanted -- they will have audio, video, and treats. No -- they -- they will have audio and video in 1C --

SENATOR STILLMAN: The treat is not being squeezed in here.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: -- and you won't be -- yes, you won't be squeezed in here. So feel free to -- to sit down there if -- if you're lacking room here.

With that we invite up for the State Department of Education, Sarah Hemingway, to be delivering testimony on behalf of Commissioner Pryor who I understand is out of state today on business. Welcome, Sarah, and happy St. Patrick's Day.

SARAH HEMINGWAY: Happy St. Patrick's Day to you, too.

My name is Sarah Hemingway. I'm the legislative liaison at the State Department of Education. You have Commissioner Pryor's written remarks, but I wanted to come in person to share comments on just a couple of bills, and then if you have questions I'm certainly happy to try and answer them.

HB5564
HB5567
HB5563
SB476
HB5562

REP. KOKORUDA: Thank you. I appreciated it. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. And I'll note that the -- that part of this measure is before the committee because advocates sent us studies indicating that 70 months in bilingual education is apparently what the latest studies indicate have the greatest efficacy, so we -- we thought we would hear the issue.

Other -- oh, Senator Stillman.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good to see you, Sarah. Thank you. It's nice to see you in that seat for a change.

There's a bill before us which is not included in your testimony. I don't know whether you've reviewed it. It's 5562, the one on special education. Section 2 of the bill addresses students who are already in a preschool education program, and a concern that's been raised to me by my constituents is that -- and it's uneven in some districts -- is that if a parent believes that their child is not ready for kindergarten, even though they might be of the entry age, and they're in special education, some of the districts are doing all they can to prohibit keeping the child back, and pushing the child forward, even though the child's not ready. Which is, you know, does not make for a very good educational experience early on in life when they can be put in a situation where they fail.

?

I -- as I said, I don't know whether you've reviewed this, but it's Section 2. I'm curious whether the department policy regarding special education students in preschool prohibits a parent of a special education child from having the same right that is already in law for a child who is not in the school system and does not have an IEP.

SARAH HEMINGWAY: We did review this legislation, and actually there's some other sections of it that we have a meeting set up next week with one of the proponents behind it. But in terms of this specific section, I did review our department's policies last week. I think we got a request from the Office of Legislative Research around this issue, and our policies do -- do not necessarily allow what you're saying is happening in those districts. It's certainly not guidance that's coming from us.

I don't know that I reviewed this language closely enough, but in terms of general around that policy, we certainly expect that all students would have those same rights. But I could -- I can review it a little more closely, and get you some further information on that.

SENATOR STILLMAN: The concern -- on a couple -- there's a concern on a couple of levels. First of all, under existing law, a parent can keep a child out of -- out of school until they're six or maybe seven, depending on -- on the reason. Here we have a population of students that are now in the public school system early than when the existing law was written for children who

are not special education. The concern that's been raised is that number one, a parental authority is -- is not being adhered to, and number two, there has been mention in some districts that there is a threat, quite frankly, that the services could end if they keep their child in -- in their pre-K special ed class for another year.

Now, I believe it's Federal Law that says if there's an IEP, they still have to provide those services, no matter -- and they still need them obviously, no matter where they're in a pre-K/four or whether they're in kindergarten, first, second, et cetera. Is that correct, that Federal Law protects them as well?

SARAH HEMINGWAY: I am not going to try to answer a question that I don't have the best information on, but I will certainly talk to our DIR of Special Ed and get back to you.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Okay. I appreciate it. You know, as we have full-day kindergarten, these special ed children are -- are many times not ready for a full-day experience at school, and -- and I -- I'm not saying we shouldn't have full-day kindergarten, but I think we have to be mindful of children and -- and their parents' concerns about an appropriate education for them. So I'd appreciate your getting back to me on -- on behalf of the department, because what's happening is that parents are fighting tooth and nail, and running all over the place to provide documentation, even when some of the

teachers in those preschool classrooms know that those children really aren't ready, but yet their administration is telling them these children have to move on. So thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Any other questions for the witness?

Representative Kokoruda for the second time, but let me say given the length of the list today, this will be the only time I'm going to recognize someone for the second time. We're all going to have just one bite at the apple today so that we can get through our list of 85 witnesses.

Go ahead, Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will get my act together; I promise. It's only the first half hour. I'll be more careful.

You might not have an answer for this, but when you get us the other information on the busing, just wanted to ask why transportation costs are being excluded from -- from reimburse -- or maybe you have that information. Why are transportation costs being removed from reimbursement from -- under ECS?

(SB472)

SARAH HEMINGWAY: So this is actually, despite how it looks, a pretty minor fix to go back the way things were. But I -- I thought that this question might come up, so I did get this answer before I came over.

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EDUCATION COMMITTEE

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11:00 A.M.

REP. BECKER: Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and Chairman Stillman, other members of the distinguished Education Committee.

For the record, my name is Brian Becker. I'm the State Representative for the 19th District. I'm here this morning in support of Raised Bill 5562, AN ACT CONCERNING DYSLEXIA AND SPECIAL EDUCATION.

The committee has my written testimony and as the Chairman alluded to, I'd like to cede my time to my constituent, Jane Lefante.

JANE LEFANTE: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Welcome. Please proceed.

JANE LEFANTE: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to speak. Thank you.

As a parent of two children with dyslexia diagnosis -- I have four children; three of them do have IEPs. I am pretty familiar with the subject. I'm also a teacher within the Connecticut Public School System. I teach reading, and I'm also a Special Education teacher.

I'm going -- you have my testimony. I won't read it verbatim. I guess what I really want you to know is I think that the fact that the bill has gotten this far is magnificent. I'm appreciative of what you have done on the bill right now. My concern, and what I'd like to bring to the table is asking you to put some

additions in there, and that would be the intervention piece.

I think it -- my testimony is right with -- in front of you, and that is in my own experience, and I -- I will speak as a parent right now, my daughters have really struggled. It was very much on us to prove that they both had dyslexia. We spent a substantial amount of time and money, and significant amount of stress on our family, trying to provide the data that they needed to identify the kids' needs, but also the intervention wasn't there, and I think it's the piece that's missing.

I'm very proud of where I teach; I'm very proud of my colleagues; I'm very proud to be a teacher. My concern is that the intervention piece isn't a known entity. People don't always recognize dyslexia. My daughter, Tessa, is here today to testify for herself. There seems to be a misconception that it really is about reversal of letters, and it's so much more than that, and it really does affect every part of a child's day, depending on the severity.

I find myself as an educator fighting for kids, advocating all the time, what I see, what I need to do to get them to the next -- to the next place. I'm not teaching as a special education teacher now; I'm teaching in the tiered intervention realm as -- as an interventionist. I teach reading -- a form of reading recovery.

I guess I want to end my testimony today just by asking you to please consider making addition to that bill that requires the State - - the State requires schools to train staff. Teachers, special educators, general education teachers, special education teachers, staff in general to -- to recognize what this is, what it means to kids, and how grossly they are affected -- negatively affected, and the stress that they are under. Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Please don't -- don't leave quite yet.

JANE LEFANTE: Oh, okay.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: There may be a few questions. I have a very simple question to pose to you because you're someone who is very familiar with the whole IEP process. And it was my understanding that if we have the State Department of Education adding dyslexia as a learning disability, and linking its definition to this nationally-recognized definition, that under -- under our laws, Federal and State that cover special education, it would then be required essentially of districts that there -- there'd be special education personnel who know how to make that identification, and who know how to have the proper interventions be part of the individualized education plan.

So I'm just -- I raise that because you're testimony makes it sound like that would not be the case, so if it's not, I'd be interested to hear why that would not be the case.

JANE LEFANTE: I'll speak as a parent. There has to be a significant -- if you've got a very -- if -- if the range of disability is broad, and if you've got a child who presents as, you know, looking like there's an issue there; however, it doesn't impact them enough in school that they stand out like a sore thumb, that we're going to watch them over the course of time. I like response intervention. I think it's a great way to look at what -- where a child is, what you can do specifically and with fidelity with interventions and see how they're going to improve. I think that's a great thing.

I think what's difficult is, if there's an area of their development that's significantly weaker, for instance mathematics, or written expression, spelling which is, you call it encoding. So if those things don't come along, and we don't have something -- and -- and if brought more broadly, mechanics of writing, organization, that's a big part. And if you don't have something that is -- if you don't have a test for that, if you don't have a way to track that, than as they move through, they move through the interventions, they might not get the specific need.

Now having said that, it depends where the child is on the continuum. I have two children who are vastly different in their diagnoses. But in particular, we struggle in our house with really getting the support she needs in mathematics. It's really, really, really a struggle. And I think, as I said, my

colleagues are doing what they can, but if you haven't had the training to understand how the brain works, and what -- how that -- how all this information coming in is interpreted, and how the kids perform, how they can perform, how can you help them?

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for that helpful clarification. I appreciate it.

Other questions from members of the committee?

Senator Boucher, to be followed by Representative LeGeyt.

SENATOR BOUCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you so much for your testimony. This is an issue of great interest in our area, in our district, and in education. And I -- I had a long conversation with a special education teacher in my district to talk about the need for having this be an actual language, as part of it. And she felt that it was not the need to do so, that in fact that they did see this as a specific category, and took that into consideration in the process. Others tell me that it -- it does need a differentiation and that there's only been one case where it's been -- something's been listed, and it was ADD, I believe, and it was done administratively through the Department of Education rather through -- than through legislation.

What would be your response to that -- to that viewpoint that they fully recognize dyslexia as

a learning disability, and incorporate it without having to put it in actual language?

JANE LEFANTE: Hands down, absolutely the best thing that could happen. But I think -- I guess my -- again, my biggest concern was the intervention piece, and I think that the fact that it's there is -- is -- was a great move forward. I think the -- but hand in hand -- but what goes with that is -- is educating -- is educating -- is really making sure staff are educated.

And you know, to a certain extent that -- that belongs at the collegiate level as well, you know. There's -- maybe there's stuff there. But I think I'm really here to speak today in support of what's been done so far, and what is on the bill, but more to add to that would be the intervention piece.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you.

Representative LeGeyt.

REP. LEGEYT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning.

JANE LEFANTE: Good morning.

REP. LEGEYT: I -- I fully support the inclusion of dyslexia as a -- as an added term of reference and topic and area of preparation for special education teachers, and for work with students in our public schools at least. My concern is how the intervention and the training you recommend would be implemented. Are special

education teachers trained -- I -- I was a teacher for a couple of decades at least, so in my training there was no specific training for dyslexia. Is that the case today? Are -- are teachers that specialize in special education trained for an awareness and intervention in dyslexia?

JANE LEFANTE: All I -- I went to college a long time ago. When I was trained at Wheelock College as a special educator, I did have some phonics training. I mean the -- the (inaudible) my understanding is -- certainly Orton-Gillingham -- I chose to go back to school and get an additional degree myself, past my Master's Degree, as a reading specialist, and I also have chosen to go back and get Orton-Gillingham certified, so I'm in the process of that, doing it myself.

I know that there's probably someone here who could -- could speak to that better than me. I -- that's what I -- I've chosen to do, just because I want to be able to have the knowledge to support the students that I'm working with and my girls.

REP. LEGEYT: Thank you, and so if -- if it's appropriate that some intervention training would be beneficial for teachers, I'm wondering on two fronts: Is it -- it's not necessarily something that you would recommend for all teachers to have, but maybe a subset of that, perhaps special education teachers, or reading -- reading teachers, and perhaps you could share whether you think that it should be done

by in-service, or whether it should be required as part of a degree going forward.

JANE LEFANTE: Well, I can -- as -- as a parent, and as a teacher, I'm appreciative of whatever anybody trains me to do. I -- I can't speak to all of that I think because I -- I never worked in that capacity to organize. I think it would be very effective to have all staff understand what dyslexia is, and it's not just about flipping -- flipping numbers and letters. So the breadth of that -- and like anything else, if -- if, you know, if you've got a problem with your hip, you go see an orthopedist. I -- I think that, you know, going -- looking at specialization is important. No one -- teachers have so much on their plates now.

REP. LEGEYT: Right.

JANE LEFANTE: It would be very hard to expect them to be an expert in everything.

REP. LEGEYT: Right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Are there other questions?

Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning and thank you for your testimony. Thank you for being here.

Just for background information, because I -- I find I don't know enough about this. I wonder

if you could just comment on how important it is to get to dyslexia early? How long it might take to deal with it? And what the difference is between getting to it very early, and finding a way for the child to deal with it, and waiting until later?

JANE LEFANTE: Well I think it says on the last page of my testimony about how critical that really is. And I worked in early intervention as a special education teacher with the three to five-year-old population, and you know, there are screenings in place now where you can start looking at phonological awareness for kids. It's not my area of specialty, so I can't speak to that, but what I can tell you, right now I do work with first graders. There's no more critical time, because not only are you looking at their academic success, but you look at shaping -- you're looking at shaping how they view the world, and their experiences in school. I mean we're there to provide successful learning experiences, and banging the same gavel on the table -- one way to teach a child is multimodal instruction which is looking at all the sensory pieces to learn. That's the way to teach kids with dyslexia. They need to touch it; they need to move it; they need to hear it; they need to see it.

Orton-Gillingham does that and variants of Orton-Gillingham do that, and if we can get to them earlier, their successes -- it has significantly more success in school, which shapes how they feel about themselves. You know, you see a lot of kids -- I don't know

what the statistics are, but I would venture to guess that there's plenty of stats out there that talk about the kids who are dropping out of school. You know, there probably is some basis of learning disability that has impacted their school success.

REP. LAVIELLE: When you do that, at what stage, on average, you know, what age do you find that they start to be able to fit into the normal or the mainstream of dealing with curriculum?

JANE LEFANTE: Dyslexia never goes away. It never goes away, so it's really more of always looking at, and teaching the child. Be aware of your -- advocate for yourself -- this is the way that you learn best; this is the way that you learn best, so the sooner we are able to identify and start to intervene, the better off that they are. And again, it varies in its severity.

REP. LAVIELLE: Sure.

JANE LEFANTE: You know, she's managed very well. Her reading has come along. We've spent a lot of time outside of school getting supports for her as well, but her reading has come along. My other daughter, not so much. The interventions weren't there early enough, and she's in eighth grade.

So you know, it really is dependent, but to answer your question, early intervention in anything in education is critical.

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REP. LAVIELLE: Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you.

Representative Molgano.

REP. MOLGANO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning. Thank you for your testimony.

In speaking directly to this lack of intervention, can you provide for us, or have any knowledge of districts, maybe in other states, that have had models that we could look to that do this well, that do it effectively?

JANE LEFANTE: I don't know if I could -- I could tell you when I was researching for further education for myself, finding in Orton-Gillingham, it was not easy to find something (inaudible.) I -- I know that there are people here that could probably share that with you. I want to say I had seen some really good things in Texas, to be honest with you, looking at -- the Scottish Rite Society supports dyslexia. I think there's a -- there's a certificate that you can get as a dyslexia specialist, but nothing really close to here.

But again, I know you can ask that question of someone else that comes up, and they'll probably be able to give you that information.

REP. MOLGANO: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you.

Are there other questions from members of the committee?

REP. BECKER: Mr. Chairman?

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Yes, Representative Becker.

REP. BECKER: Would the committee prefer to wait to hear from Tessa, her daughter, until the student sign-up, or would you prefer to hear from her at this time, given the large crowd you have and the time.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Yeah, well we always hear students first after public officials, but if there's a family situation where Ms. Lefante would be planning to leave were it not for the fact that she is waiting for her daughter to testify, we could make an exception.

JANE LEFANTE: I can -- I can do whatever's best for the committee. That's fine.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: The system of the committee is we will go straight from public officials to students. Students always come first after -- after elected officials here at the Education Committee, so their -- their time is approaching shortly.

REP. BECKER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you.

JANE LEFANTE: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Senator Cathy Osten.

SENATOR OSTEN: Hi, how is -- how are you all today?

Good morning, Senator Stillman, and Representative Fleischmann. I'm Senator Cathy Osten. I'm from the 19th Senatorial District, as Mr. Becker was from the 19th State Representative, I'm from the 19th Senatorial District, and I'm here today to testify in support of House Bill No. 5562, which adds dyslexia to the individualized education program form used by planning and placement teams for services for children requiring special education.

Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability, and it is estimated that up to 20 percent of the nation's population suffers from some of the symptoms of dyslexia. Dyslexia, as a term, refers to a cluster of symptoms that results in difficulties with language skills, particularly reading.

The core challenges students with dyslexia face are with word recognition, reading fluency, spelling and writing. These challenges with reading are often attributed to a student's difficulty identifying the separate speech sounds within words, or learning how letters represent those separate speech sounds.

Additionally, students with less severe symptoms early in their education may experience increased trouble later on when they

have to rely on more complex language skills such as grammar, understanding material in a textbook, or writing essays.

While dyslexia is most often associated with reading and writing, students with dyslexia could also have problems with the spoken language. They may have trouble expressing themselves clearly, or trouble comprehending what others say to them. In addition to these academic challenges, dyslexia can also create emotional issues as well, adding to a student's struggles in school.

The broad array of challenges students with dyslexia experience demonstrates the need for action by schools, partnerships with parents, and individualized programs catered to each student. By adding dyslexia to the individualized education program form, this bill places dyslexia on the radar. It can help facilitate recognition and intervention so students with dyslexia can learn in environments that recognize their needs and facilitate their learning.

House Bill 5562 helps students by adding dyslexia to the form, thereby calling on schools to work with these students so they can reach their best potential.

I have received information from Decoding Dyslexia, a group dedicated to raising awareness of dyslexia. At the behest of Allison Quirion, the Connecticut chapter of Decoding Dyslexia was formed in February 2013.

Parents help each other by sharing experiences in school systems, and consequently empowering one another to become better advocates for their children. I am personally grateful to Allison and the members of Decoding Dyslexia for sending me information about their experiences. These stories highlight the need for Legislative action in order for our schools to truly take care of dyslexic students. House Bill 5562 is a step in this direction because it adds dyslexia to the form, raises awareness of the diagnosis as a learning disability and calls on schools to create individualized courses of action for students.

I respectfully ask and thank the committee for their support of House Bill 5562 thus far, and ask for its passage. And I'd be happy to answer any questions, but I really want to thank you, Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischmann, for bringing this issue out for a public hearing. It allows us to flesh out the discussion and I really appreciate it. It's something that I've been advocating for since meeting with my constituent, Allison, who is here today to testify.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you both for your testimony and your advocacy. You are one of the first legislators to come to the committee this year to raise the issue, and we appreciate it.

SENATOR OSTEN: Thank you very much.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Are there questions from members of the committee?

Representative Conroy.

REP. CONROY: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you Senator for being here and giving that great testimony. I'm not sure if you're the one who can answer these questions, but I just have some concerns. Do you know if there's any reports of studies linking up the dyslexia on success later in life, or depression, and how people are going to be working later.

SENATOR OSTEN: I don't know if there are any reports or studies that have been done for that, but I can tell you that -- that the -- I can only speak from my sort of past work experience.

So my past work experience was working in the Department of Correction for 21 years, and most of the people that we get into the Department of Correction that participate in the Unified School District have learning disabilities that were not paid attention to early enough for them to be successful. And the best weapon for us to keep children out of the prison system is to provide a good education that equips them to be successful in their life. That is the number one best thing that we can do if we want to really decrease the inmate population. So I can speak to it from that, but specifically on dyslexia, any time that you -- you know this just -- just from being just a regular person, you know that if you cannot be successful and are called stupid or a dummy, then that does impact how you are emotionally, and having a

healthy emotional child is certainly the best thing to make them successful in school, so.

SENATOR CONROY: Thank you for your response and maybe someone else testifying today might be able to give you that information. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Are there questions for the good Senator? If not, thank you very much for your time, your testimony and advocacy.

JANE LEFANTEEE: Thank you very much.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Oops, sorry.

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN: Thank you, Chairman. Thank you very much for your testimony this -- this morning turning into afternoon at this point.

SENATOR OSTEN: Both.

REP. SRINIVASAN: Yeah, very close, very close. Thank you very much.

Obviously early detection is very critical, and early intervention extremely important in --

SENATOR OSTEN: Correct.

REP. SRINIVASAN: -- in evaluating and managing patients with dyslexia. There's no question about that at all, so we need to get to them as

soon as we can and do whatever we can so that we are able, as you said, divulge -- I mean the bullying words that have been used, you want to try to avoid our children having to have that unfortunate and very unpleasant experience.

In your experience, and in your readings, could you comment on when we have intervened early enough, what has been the outcome over a period of time? I don't know if I'm phrasing my question appropriately or not, but the difference between non-intervention, and intervention, and obviously early intervention -- what are the positive, if such a thing can - can be quantified at all?

SENATOR OSTEN: Well I'm not going to bring in all the reports that there are out there on dyslexia, and I -- I am not an educator. I'm not trained that way, but I can tell you that when you have children that are not -- that -- that we cannot intervene early enough in their life on their reading skills, it impacts everything else that they do.

If they're not able to read and assimilate the information, and -- and -- it's not just -- it's not just about the letters; it's about numbers also, that they're not going to be successful in moving on. I talked to the director of the Reliance House in Norwich, a very educated man who suffers from dyslexia. And he had to go back to -- in order to get his PhD he went back to community college and said please teach me how to read; I still don't know how to read. And while he was successful,

because I don't want to say that children who have dyslexia are not going to be successful. We have many cases, and -- and certainly some in our own state, and I can point to the director of the Reliance House and our own Governor as folks who have been -- have been successful. But they had families that intervened for them. They -- they were able to have all of the resources necessary for them to be successful.

My concern is that without having those resources that children fall through the cracks, and that's really my concern. And I could point to the fact that in talking with the Commission of Correction, that he has identified two issues, one with which this body has already addressed, and -- and one which we're asking them to address, that they find are most prevalent inside the Department of Correction in regards to people who are having trouble associating with and -- and abiding by the rules were autism and dyslexia.

So those folks who did not have the same sort of resources that the director of the Reliance House did, an active, supportive family. Everybody that's here today has an active, supportive family. There is no question that their children will be successful. The question is, should we deal with it on an earlier basis so they're more successful. That's really the question that we're trying to answer here today, and -- and that's where I am with it.

REP. SRINIVASAN: Thank you very much. Thank you, Sir.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Representative.

Any other questions for the good Senator? If not, thank you very much for your time, --

SENATOR OSTEN: Thank you. Thanks for --

REP. FLEISCHMANN: -- your testimony, and advocacy.

SENATOR OSTEN: -- thank you. Have a nice day.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: You, too.

We next have a -- a sort of a East Hartford delegation that's going to join us. Senator Gary LeBeau, Representative Tim Larson, board chairman Jeff Curry, and Superintendent Nate Quesnel.

Feel free to -- to roll up chairs. Oh, and it looks like the Mayor is also going to join the group. That's terrific. The entire leadership team of East Hartford is here, so we better hope that no one with ill will towards East Hartford is aware of the concentration of power that's occurring here.

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SENATOR LEBEAU: Mr. Chairman, it may be frightening, but I'm not sure it's a concentration of power.

It's good to be here, and thank you for letting us speak together this morning.

in this case from students. So I'm going to exercise the prerogative of the Chair, and thank you for coming before us, and make sure we move now to the public.

We have young Jack Quirion waiting, to be followed by Senator Fasano, to be followed by student, Kayla Daley.

Welcome, Jack.

JACK QUIRION: My name is Jack. I'm ten years old, and I am dyslexic. I support the bill known as 5562, Section 1.

I found out I had dyslexia at the end of second grade. There was a lot of testing. When it was over, they told me I needed reading help. When I got out of the room and closed the door, I said to myself I don't care if I read as fast as my brother; I don't care if I read as good as my dad.

That night, when I got home, my whole family sat on the bed -- on my bed. My mom read a book about dyslexia. She told me that I had dyslexia. She said my -- my dyslexia makes it hard for me to learn how to read. We talked about how I will learn to read. We also talked about famous dyslexics like Walt Disney, Albert Einstein, and Steve Jobs.

When I told my friend, Nick, I was dyslexic, he said, "What is that?" I told him it was a reading disability at school. At school almost everyone knows I have dyslexia. It is not bad,

but it is annoying because everyone asks, "What is dyslexia?", or, "Isn't dyslexia when you read backwards?" No, it is your brain doing things differently.

I wish I had help earlier. I wish I knew I was dyslexic earlier. Before I knew I had dyslexic, I felt confused. I felt like crying every day because I couldn't read, and my friends could. Reading was really hard. Now that I know I have dyslexia, I feel like I'm on top of the world, and my reading is improving. I read this.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Yes you did, and very well might I add.

So; Jack, you don't -- we're not done with you yet. Please come back to your seat. Let me just ask, what grade are you in now, Jack.

JACK QUIRION: Fifth.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Fifth grade. So -- so it's been three years since you got your diagnosis, and do you feel like the support that you've gotten since then has -- has been helpful in getting you to the place that you are today?

JACK QUIRION: Yes.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: And do I understand your testimony to mean that if you had been -- if your dyslexia had been spotted earlier, you think maybe it would have been easier for you in those early grades?

JACK QUIRION: Yeah, much easier.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Well let me just say that you have done extraordinarily well. There are a lot of fifth graders who don't have dyslexia who wouldn't have had either the reading skills or the presence that you showed here today. So we thank you for -- for your willingness to come forward and speak in favor of this bill.

Are there questions or comments from others in the committee?

My -- my co-chair would also like to.

SENATOR STILLMAN: First of all welcome, and thank you. You did do a great job and you took my line away. I was going to say see you're doing so well, you read this. So you anticipated what we were thinking as well. I'm glad you're in a better place mentally so that you can handle the school work. If you're in fifth grade, you must be at great level --

JACK QUIRION: Uh-huh.

SENATOR STILLMAN: -- at the age of ten.

JACK QUIRION: Yeah.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Which is a good -- good sign that what, you know, the things your parents are doing, and the teachers are doing to help you is -- is working, and I just wanted to wish you success as you move forward, and let you know

how important it is that you are here as well as all the other children who are going to testify, and their parents, so I'm glad we're not keeping you too late, because I know it's almost lunchtime, and you're probably hungry.

JACK QUIRION: Yeah.

SENATOR STILLMAN: But thank you so much for being here and expressing the difficulties you had, but also the hope. Thanks.

JACK QUIRION: You're welcome.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you.

Are there any other comments or questions?

Representative LeGeyt.

REP. LEGEYT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Jack, welcome.

JACK QUIRION: Thanks.

REP. LEGEYT: First I want to say how -- what an extraordinary young man you are to be able to come here, and speak, and read your testimony in front of all these adults, and in front of this committee like this. I'm -- I'm giving you a lot of respect and kudos for doing that.

I also am impressed that you are able to talk about your dyslexia and -- and show us how successful you've been in overcoming it.

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JACK QUIRION: Uh-huh.

REP. LEGEYT: And I want to ask you, of all the -- of all the help that you've gotten since the end of second grade when you were identified as a dyslexic, can you tell us what -- what was the -- what made the most difference? What was the biggest help that you got?

JACK QUIRION: Probably the tutors after school was the biggest help, and like I would get pulled out of class like during math or something to like read with other teachers, and they would help, so that was kind of a big help.

REP. LEGEYT: Thank you so much, Jack, and we're so glad that you were able to come here today and share this with us.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Any other questions? If not, thank you very much, Jack. Very well done.

JACK QUIRION: Thanks.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Senator Len Fasano and I believe Representative Vin Candelora, and perhaps a constituent of theirs as well as a delegation.

Welcome.

JOEY DAVENPORT: Mr. Chairman, Senators, and Representatives, and guests, my name is Joey

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Davenport. I am 15 years old and I'm a sophomore at Vinal Tech, and I'm dyslexic.

I was diagnosed with dyslexia in seventh grade. At the time I was reading on a third grade level and decoding on a kindergarten level. I see things mechanically. Ask me to read an English textbook and write a paper, and I'll just give you a blank stare. But ask me to open up the hood of a car and tear down an engine, and that's easy.

Words on a page look like gibberish. They bounce around in my head, and I can't always make them out, but when I look at an engine, I can just not only see what you see, the outside, but I can see the inside of the engine, all the internal parts working together, gas and air flowing through the engine.

We dyslexics have a different mind. We are mechanical, artistic, creative, brilliant, and even geniuses. So I'm mechanical.

I'm lucky to be in a school where my talents can shine, where I can start the groundwork to being a great mechanic. Before I was diagnosed with dyslexia, when I went to school I used to think it would just be another day where -- where I wouldn't be understood, when a teacher would point at a paper and say over and over you know this, you know this, but I really didn't.

I don't think being called -- I don't like being called to answer questions out loud because it takes me longer to process the answers and -- and I feel like everyone thinks I'm an idiot. Reading aloud in class is one of my least favorite things to do. I feel like people think I'm trying just to get by. When I make mistakes someone else shouts out the word, making me feel dumb, but the truth -- but the truth is, I knew the word; I just messed up.

But without being diagnosed with dyslexia, I would not be able to read this paper, or get the help I needed. Since seventh grade I haven't had a summer vacation. I've attended special classes at the Dyslexia Institute three days a week during the summer, and during the school year attending tutoring there two days per week after school, and two more days at school. Most kids spend 30 hours a week in school; I spend 38.

Please recognize dyslexia as a learning disability so all dyslexics can have the same - - all dyslexics can have the same chance I -- to succeed. Honestly the stacks of papers next to all of you would be too overwhelming for me, but I ask you how many of you can build an engine?

REP. FLEISCHMANN: I cannot rebuild an engine, so I'll be candid about that. And it would look like gibberish to me.

Let me just first thank you. You know, you mentioned in your testimony that reading aloud

is one of your least favorite things to do, and you did it today in front of an entire committee, and an entire audience, so it was obviously an act of courage and selflessness on your part to do that, to help other people with dyslexia, and -- and we really do appreciate your willingness to do that.

And I'm just wondering, you know, seventh grade is pretty late to get a diagnosis, right? That's a lot of school years that you went through where you were perhaps dealing with questions from teachers or -- or other students that were not fair. Do you have any sense as to why it may be that it took so long for the educators you worked with to figure out that you had dyslexia?

JOEY DAVENPORT: I was tested in first grade, but not in school, and the tester said he will need to be tested again in third or fourth grade. I was tested again in third and fourth grade by my school, and they didn't do it right.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: So you were given a test in third grade or fourth grade, but they did not figure out at that point that you had dyslexia.

JOEY DAVENPORT: My school said that -- once I got found out in seventh grade that I was a dyslexic, they said, we can't do anything about that; it's not registered.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: So then given that circumstance, how did you manage to get all the help that's allowed you to get to the -- to the strong

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point that you've reached today in reading and expressing yourself?

JOEY DAVENPORT: Going to -- going after school since seventh grade to an institute (inaudible).

REP. FLEISCHMANN: And that's something that your family chose to do to help you, but it's not part of the regular school curriculum of your school system?

JOEY DAVENPORT: Yeah.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. That's -- that's chilling, but a helpful clarification. We appreciate it.

Are there other questions?

Senator Stillman to be followed by Representative Ackert.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and -- and welcome, Joey.

You go to Vinal Tech now because you're a wonderful mechanic, and they're going to help you succeed in that area, and you obviously love to do that. But what town do you live in?

JOEY DAVENPORT: Durham, Connecticut.

SENATOR STILLMAN: I'm sorry, what? Durham?

JOEY DAVENPORT: Durham.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Durham. Okay. And you were going to the Durham public school?

JOEY DAVENPORT: Yes.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Okay. I'm trying to figure out in terms of the attention that you did not get, at what -- what school -- school district it was.

Do you have any other friends that are dyslexic -- have been diagnosed as such?

JOEY DAVENPORT: I know they're -- they're not diagnosed, but I have a feeling they are dyslexic.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Because? Because?

JOEY DAVENPORT: One in five kids are.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Oh, only because of that statistic as opposed to --

JOEY DAVENPORT: They learn the same way I do.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Pardon?

JOEY DAVENPORT: They learn the same way I do.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Okay. That's -- that's what I was looking for. Well, thank you for being here. I appreciate your sharing your story with us, and -- and imparting some new information for us as well, and I wish you success at Vinal Tech in whatever, you know, future that you

envision for yourself. I -- I think being here was probably a good step forward for you to help you overcome that reading out loud business, so thank you again.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Madam Co-Chair.

Distinguished Ranking Member Tim Ackert.

REP. ACKERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Joey, thank you for coming. Just a question now on -- since I used to work on cars, which I still do, but I still do the paper manuals. Are they mostly on manuals now still for auto tech, or it is computer screens now? And how do you feel -- how do you manage dealing with that, you know, like the chronological process when repairing something?

JOEY DAVENPORT: My teacher that I have for my automotive class is very hands on. He always brings in clutches and parts that we need to look at to figure out how it works and everything. And he's had all these models made by the kids that are like hand-cranked engines, all the gas and air flowing through chambers and everything. It just helps so much.

REP. ACKERT: Great, and -- and thank you, and as the good Chair did mention, you know, not all of us have the ability -- that mechanical aspect of it. That's another language to many people, so you understand that language, so thank you, and I wish you the best.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you.

Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA: Thank you. Well it's good to see you today, Joey. I actually represent your town, but the other part of your town, so it's good to see you here with your Representative.

Let me just ask you: You talk about your summer program. Is that provided through your school system? Is this done privately? How is that taken care of?

JOEY DAVENPORT: My school pays for me to go to the Dyslexic Institute.

REP. KOKORUDA: The school does? And it pays it in total?

JOEY DAVENPORT: Yes.

REP. KOKORUDA: All year round, or just in the summer?

JOEY DAVENPORT: All year round.

REP. KOKORUDA: All year round? Okay, and then I just want to tell you something. You talk about that you learn differently, maybe not in the typical way, but listening to you, and listening to the young man before you, you've gotten so far that -- that maybe it's not

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ordinary, it's extraordinary, and you're a very extraordinary young man, so thank you for being here and talking to all of us today. We appreciate it. Thank you.

JOEY DAVENPORT: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Representative Kokoruda.

Senator Fasano.

SENATOR FASANO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, the questions that you asked and Senator Stillman asked -- his mother, Joey's mother, is down -- is in the back, and she will be testifying later. And I think those are great questions that you asked, and perhaps she can put some more meat on the bones to get the answers that I think you may be looking for.

And we thank the committee for raising this important bill, and you guys have been great with education. This committee does terrific work, and we'll look forward to the progress of this bill.

Thank you very much.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Anyone else who wishes to remark? If not, thank you Senator, Representative, and Joey Davenport. We appreciate all that you brought to the committee.

Kayla Daley. Your moment in the sun is here if you're still here, to be followed by Senator Carlo Leone.

KYLA DALEY: Hi, my name is Kyla Daley and I'm a senior at Norwalk High School, and this is for the House Bill 5562.

Palms sweating, heart pounding. A focused gaze on anything but her. The one who can change my playground status from artisan to jester with just a few words: "Kyla, it's your turn to read." This shook my seven-year-old core. There was no escape route, superhero, or invisibility cloak that could save me from this moment. Me shaking, I stood up looking down at the paper that was now drenched in sweat from my palms. I tried not to make eye contact with my peers, but it didn't help them from -- stop -- but it didn't stop them from staring at me. It was like they knew that once I stood up, no words would come out of my mouth. I saw no connection to how the symbols on the paper could create the words we speak.

Reading aloud was painful, not just for me, but for the audience to sit through. My face as red as a tomato, sounding out every letter, and trying to make sense of what appeared to me as nonsense, to a natural reader, a sentence.

It didn't hit me that there was a problem until those moments in class. However, others knew that I had a problem, yet there was no answer to what it was. So to try and figure it out, I was taken out of class every Friday and placed

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in a room with a woman who would ask me the same questions, and show me the same cards, and make me take the same test, and so there was no answer as to why I was quickly falling behind my classmates. The problem about this was no teacher told me that I was doing things wrong.

When I began working with a special ed teacher daily in the first grade, I would take computerized spelling tests. I would get every single word wrong. I did not know at the time, because the teacher did not tell me that I would get every word wrong. This was, she said, to protect my self esteem.

My education persisted and I began to go from school to intensive tutoring because it was at the point where my reading and writing levels were so low, that there was a chance of me staying back yet another year. I began not to care for school. My social skills decreased extensively while my acting skills improved to a level of Academy Award winning for best actress of faking sick. My brother, on the other hand, who is also dyslexic, went through the experience -- same experience as me, except turned to the bad-boy route, making his home the principal's office.

To cut it short, it was not the school system that taught me how to read. It was my persistent mother who pushed my brother and me on learning how to read, bringing us to clinics that focused mainly on kids like us because the school system didn't know how to do it. Thanks

to the intensive support I received outside of school, I was one of the lucky ones.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. May I ask what grade are you in now?

KYLA DALEY: I'm a senior.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Senior. If you had not started off your testimony by sharing with the committee that you had been diagnosed with dyslexia, I -- I doubt anyone here would have had any way of knowing it. You read beautifully and that's a testament to your mother's commitment and your own.

I'm wondering if you could share with us -- you mentioned that you found intensive support sort of outside of your school. What kind of supports did you and your family find that -- that got you to this great point that you've reached now?

KYLA DALEY: We went to -- me and my brother went to Lindamood-Bell which is a school mainly for kids with dyslexia, and they teach you reading and writing skills. And in the second grade I left for three months to go and work with them every day.

A VOICE: (Inaudible.)

KYLA DALEY: I was -- I had more -- I was more near my class, kind of, I don't know the word. But I -- kind of, but I don't think they helped me

as much. I still, after that three-month period, I still went to the school.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Well just for you to know, the -- the policy of the State of Connecticut is ostensibly that any student who has special needs gets an individualized education plan to help address those needs. So I'm sorry for all that you and your family had to go through outside of the schools to get the help that you needed, but we'll try and make sure that other students get not only an early diagnosis, but the early supports they deserve. That's one of the reasons the bill is before us.

Are there other questions from members of the committee?

Representative Molgano.

REP. MOLGANO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon.

KYLA DALEY: Hi.

REP. MOLGANO: Thank you for your great testimony. The person that spoke before you said that his school district helped with paying for the help he got from another institution. Did Norwalk help pay for your school?

KYLA DALEY: I don't believe so, because I was not diagnosed (inaudible).

REP. MOLGANO: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Any other questions for the witness? If not, thank you very much for your time, and your testimony, and your advocacy.

KYLA DALEY: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Senator Carlo Leone, to be followed by Tom Rimkunas.

SENATOR LEONE: Good afternoon, Chairs, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and Ranking Members Senator Boucher, Representative Ackert, and Members of the Education Committee.

I am Senator Carlo Leone. I wanted to thank you today for your consideration for H.B. 5564, AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL SAFETY, and specifically for including Sections 4, 5, and 6 on the establishment and submission of a Safe School Climate Plans and its importance in reducing bullying behavior in our schools.

Last year in my community and nearby, the effects of bullying behavior has led to suicides in our schools. In one extreme case, after the suicide, it was made public that the bullying behavior was known to too many for far too long, and no direct intervention occurred. Rather than submit to the ongoing behavior, the student chose to end his life. It never should have happened, but it did, and we must act.

I believe we must do all we can to prevent the harmful effects and behaviors that result from bullying. This behavior leads to isolation,

Thank you very much, Senator. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Representative. And I would observe that there is also included in this bill a tip line that is purely anonymous. So we are sensitive to that concern.

Are there other questions or comments from members of the committee?

If not, Senator Leone, thank you for your time and advocacy.

SENATOR LEONE: Thank you, to you, the Chairs, and Ranking Members, and to all the committee members. I look forward to any input, and I thank you for your time.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Is Tom Rimkunas here?

And Tom is to be followed by Deputy Attorney General Perry Zinn-Rowthorn.

Please -- please press the button in front of you that will turn on the red light and allow us to hear you better. There you go.

TOM RIMKUNAS: Hi. My name is Thomas Rimkunas. I am 11 years old. My address is 66 Grant Street, CT. I support the dyslexia bill 5562, Section 1.

I found out I had dyslexia in the middle of first grade. Dyslexia has affected me since

kindergarten. I was not able to recognize letters or words. In the first grade I failed every spelling test. Sometimes I got zeros. I got so mad in school I couldn't even speak. One of the kids told me that I was a loser because I couldn't read or spell.

When I was in the middle of first grade, my mom took me to Mr. (inaudible) who helped me with my dyslexia. He was nice and very helpful. He always makes sure I understand the concept of what I'm learning. I still go to him for help. If it -- if it weren't for his help, I would still be reading second grade books in the sixth grade. I would like to read the same books that my friends read.

I support the bill so that the other kids can get the help they need and don't have to fail tests the way I did.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Tom, not only for that excellent reading of your thoughtful testimony, but for the way you're focused on trying to make sure that kids who follow behind you don't have to suffer some of the -- some of the indignities that you had to put up with unfairly.

I hope and expect that at this point you get the kind of respect from your -- your schoolmates that you -- you deserve, and that you're -- you're more comfortable with reading aloud. You seemed very comfortable reading in front of this large studio audience, and we thank you for your willingness to do that.

Is that a fair assessment, that with all the supports you've gotten, that reading is now a lot easier for you than it was in kindergarten or first grade?

I will take that -- I will take that as a yes, Tom. I will take that as a yes, and I won't put you on the spot, because I know that that's probably not fun for you. But I -- I just wanted to let you know how much all of us appreciate your willingness to tell your story, and to help make sure that other kids get the kind of supports they deserve early. We really appreciate it. It takes a lot of courage to -- to come up and testify. It's hard to sit where you're sitting, and we appreciate your doing that for us. So thank you. Have a good day.

TOM RIMKUNAS: Okay.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Deputy Attorney General Perry Zinn-Rowthorn, to be followed by Tessa Lefante.

DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL PERRY ZINN-ROWTHORN: Good afternoon, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Boucher, Representative Ackert, members of the committee. Tom did a great job; he's a tough act to follow.

I'm here with Ralph Urban, Assistant Attorney General. We're here to testify in support of Senate Resolution 7 and House Resolution 4 concerning approval of the settlement agreement in Sheff versus O'Neill. Also with us today is a representative of the State Department of

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SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you for that clarification,
and we appreciate your being here.

DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL PERRY ZINN-ROWTHORN: Thank
you very much.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you.

A VOICE: (Inaudible.)

SENATOR STILLMAN: Yeah, I know, but I don't know if
she wants to.

Next is Tessa Lefante. Is she still here?
There she is. We heard from her mom earlier,
so. And Tessa will be followed by
Representative Candelora. Go right ahead. Oh,
he went already? Okay, Senator -- Senator
Kelly will be next. Welcome, Tessa.

TESSA LEFANTE: Hi. Hi, my name is Tessa Lefante,
and I support Bill 5562. I am dyslexic. When
my mom asked me to do a speech about what would
help you all understand what would make a
difference for kids like me to learn better, I
said, yeah, I'll do it, but inside I was really
nervous. I -- I was thinking what if they
don't listen or take me seriously. I thought -
- I thought though I should try and get you to
listen and hope that you remember what I --
what has happened to me when you make laws.

Since I only have a few minutes, I am going to
start my readings. My mom has been trying --
has been trying to get my school to find the
best way to help me -- me in math, spelling,

writing, and ways to help me stay focused and organized. She has been -- she has also been trying to get them to understand my anxiety and stress -- my anxiety and stress. I'm -- I'm -- I get really stressed out and sick when I -- when I get overwhelmed by work not being right. My mom has been trying to get them to recognize that I have dyslexia since first grade. I'm in fifth grade now.

My teachers are just -- my teacher is just beginning to understand, but my -- but other teachers do not. People like my doctors, therapists, and others who write reports and describe -- described ways to help me learn better have gotten really frustrated and mad because no one seems to listen at school.

My parents offered to send in a laptop or iPad in third grade, but no one could really understand how to use technology for kids with dyslexia. My mom knew what -- what I needed because she is a reading and special ed teacher. The school would not listen to approve. It made me mad; it made me feel pretty sad because -- and very sad because I could not do all the work that they gave me.

What I'm trying to say is that we need to train our teachers how to understand that dyslexia is more than turning our letters around. It really affects me in most subjects, but really makes math, writing, and spelling hard.

I am asking you to please, please train your teachers to recognize that -- and help kids as

soon as they start having trouble. Don't make kids wait to get help, because it affects their whole life -- it affects your whole life. I don't know what middle school will be like for me, but I hope the teachers there know about dyslexia, and I hope that now you do, too.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you very much. Good job, Tessa. Like so many of the children here, you're lucky you have such a -- a mother who's -- who advocates for you as you -- you mentioned in your testimony, and her fighting for you, as so many parents do. It's very important for your future, so we appreciate your sharing your story with us as well.

Does anyone have any questions for Tessa?

Representative Fleischmann, followed by Representative Ackert.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Tessa, I just wanted to reassure you. In your testimony, you said you weren't sure if people would listen, or if they would understand. So I just want to -- want you to be reassured that we listened; we do understand. That's why we have this bill before us, and we hope that all children in Connecticut will get early identification if they have dyslexia and get the kind of supports that they need. So thank you for your bravery in coming forward and doing such a wonderful job reading your testimony.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT: Thank you, Madam Chair, and as always the good Chair read my mind, or I read his mind, but one of the things -- we're considered professional listeners. That's our job, to listen to you guys, so that's one thing we do. Your mom did a great job testifying, giving us a lot of information, like many parents, great advocates for their, you know, a parent for their children.

You again, just -- you're -- you're in fifth grade now, Tessa?

TESSA LEFANTE: Yes.

REP. ACKERT: Okay, and you were identified in first grade, is that correct?

TESSA LEFANTE: I think so, yeah.

REP. ACKERT: Okay. I just wanted to catch that because it's, you know, four years, and you're -- and you seem to be -- school system seems to be struggling with this, and I wanted to clarify that, so thank you so much, Tessa, and thank you for coming today.

TESSA LEFANTE: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Other questions for Tessa?

Thank you very much.

Senator Kevin Kelly is up to be followed by Liam Kells.

I see on my list that there's a Kevin Kelly, Jr., listed, and if you'd like to do a father-son joint appearance, that is always welcome at the Education Committee.

SENATOR KELLY: Thank you, Chairman Fleischmann, Ranking Members, Representative Ackert, and Senator Boucher, and all Members of the Education Committee.

My name is State Senator Kevin Kelly. I represent the 21st District which includes Monroe, Seymour, Shelton, and Stratford. I also have with me my son, Kevin Kelly, who is a fifth grader at St. James in Stratford. And thank you for the opportunity testify in support of House Bill No. 5564, AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL SAFETY.

Following the tragedy at Sandy Hook, the State and Municipalities took a critical look at school safety infrastructure. Last session the General Assembly took significant action to help protect our schools with the establishment of School Security Infrastructure Grants. Our intention was, and is, to protect our children, and make every school a safe place to live, to learn, and to grow. However, by leaving private schools out of the equation, we are missing the mark and not fulfilling all of our intentions. We must extent school security grants to support every school in Connecticut, public and private.

To make our schools safe, significant infrastructure improvements need to be

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Andrea Estell from the Union Board of Education, to be followed by Liam Kells. Or actually, I take it back; I'm sorry. I believe Liam was next. I -- I got confused because Kevin Kelly, Junior jumped up, but Liam, with having put on a jacket and tie like that, you really -- you deserve to go next.

LIAM KELLS: I would like to thank the Education Committee for the opportunity to testify. My name is Liam Kells, a student in tenth grade at Fairfield College Preparatory High School in Fairfield, Connecticut.

I am in support of bill RHB 5562, Section 1, AN ACT -- AN ACT CONCERNING SPECIAL EDUCATION. I'm dyslexic, and I always will be. My mom -- my mother had me tested in second grade because no matter how much extra reading help I received, I could not learn how to read. The results were that I had no serious disability. Then during that summer, my parents had me re-tested privately outside of the public school, and it showed that I was very dyslexic.

In third grade I went into special education, and received specialized reading instruction. However, in that school year, I continued to dramatically fall behind in reading compared to my peers.

Special education was a two step forward, one step backward process. It was -- it wasn't helping as much as it should.

I believe that I would have benefited from an early, proper, dyslexic -- dyslexia screening because I would have been identified as dyslexic in either kindergarten or first grade. Kindergarten and first grade are the best years for teaching children how to read. Why shouldn't dyslexics learn how to read in those grades, too. It's not all -- it's not at all fair that dyslexics don't even begin to get kind of specialized reading instructions until about third grade. While the non-dyslexics are learning their ABC's, the unfortunately dyslexics are completely confused, feeling stupid, and feeling totally inadequate for years -- for years until someone recognizes that they -- that maybe there is a learning issue, which usually doesn't happen until third grade or older.

I think that if I was tested at a very early age, and then given specialized reading instruction, the story of my educational career would have been completely different. I would have been able to stay in public school and use my new reading skills to learn science, math, English, social studies, et cetera, without having to struggle and ultimately leave the comfort of my neighborhood school and go to a specialized school that taught me how to read.

When my mother and I discovered we both were dyslexic, we went straight to the computer to search of the term "dyslexia." There we found not only what dyslexia was, but what were the specialized reading instruction methods that need to be used to teach dyslexics how to read.

In addition, the search resulted in identifying a lot of very successful people who were dyslexic.

The term "specific learning disability" is what is used in public school when a child is identified as reading disabled. Specific Learning Disability seems more like a broad mystery, and hurts more than it helps. To be labeled specific learning disability, you do not have a clear definition of what it is, and defined way of remitting it. You also do not find anyone, successful or not, that identifies themselves as specific learning disabled.

As a result the child has no sense of hope that he or she is going to be able to learn how to read and ultimately be successful. I strongly believe that teachers and children will benefit from teacher training in the area of dyslexia. Teachers will benefit by knowing that they are teaching all of their students how to read. Dyslexic children will benefit because they will learn to read at the same time as their peers.

With being instructed -- instructed in -- in the specialized way, dyslexic children will be themselves as equal, not less than, everyone else in their classroom and school. Teachers could also help -- help avoid stigmatizing situations for dyslexic children, for example, not calling on them to read aloud in class. This would give the child hope and show that others really do care about them, especially the teachers.

From personal experience I know that dyslexic children often do not feel like their teachers truly care about them or believe in them.
Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. As we've -- we've heard from some other students today, you may not like reading aloud in class, but you seem to have a gift for reading aloud in a larger audience, so we appreciate your willingness to do that.

The part of your story that -- that struck me and -- and concerns me most relates to the fact that your public school gave you a test in second grade supposedly to figure out whether or not you had a reading disability.

LIAM KELLS: Yeah. My mother, she had to have that like put in place.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Okay, so -- so at special request of your family you get this -- you got this test from the -- the public school that you were attending.

LIAM KELLS: Yes.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: And after taking that test, they told you you're -- you're not reading as well as you could, but there's no specific disability here?

LIAM KELLS: Yeah, that there was basically nothing wrong.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Nothing at all.

LIAM KELLS: There was no disability that was serious.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: And then that summer you took a test outside of the school system --

LIAM KELLS: Yeah.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: -- that showed dyslexia. And do you -- I mean this is a long time ago for you now, but do you remember were the tests similar or -- or very different?

LIAM KELLS: No, I -- I don't remember if they were similar, but I would believe that they were very different because of the results being very different.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: And then when you got this very different result, and you came back to school in third grade, your family obviously presented that information --

LIAM KELLS: Yeah.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: -- and then -- then at that point the school district started to provide you with supports that -- that addressed the dyslexia and helped you become the excellent reader that you are now?

LIAM KELLS: Yes. Yeah, well, I didn't really receive the proper education for my dyslexia

and improving on my reading until I later left in fifth grade and went to a private school called Winston Preparatory School. And for four years I -- I was taught how to read and that's basically why I'm able to reach this speech in the first place.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: So you had four or five years in the public schools where you and your family had informed them that you had been diagnosed with dyslexia. They supposedly were giving you supports, but those were not good enough to -- to get you to the -- to the place you wanted to be in reading?

LIAM KELLS: My parents ultimately saw that in the future I would be falling behind significantly. The thing is, not only does it affect reading in general. It's not just a reading disability. Once you get past third grade, you not -- you're no longer learning to read; you're reading to learn. And so they ultimately saw that if I wasn't going to get any better at reading, I wasn't going to get any better at other subjects.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Well thank you for that explanation, and it sounds like you and your family went through a lot to get you to the point that you're at today, and I just want to congratulate you on the way you've overcome the challenges that were put before you. You seemed poised to -- to take off.

Are there other questions from members of the committee?

Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT: Thank you. Thank you, Liam, for coming here today. You mentioned that your mom and you went online and found the definition for dyslexia. When -- when was that? Between the second and third grades?

LIAM KELLS: Yes.

REP. ACKERT: Or was it after that?

LIAM KELLS: No. It was between the second and third grade.

REP. ACKERT: Okay, it was at that time frame.

LIAM KELLS: And when the test results basically came back that I was dyslexic.

REP. ACKERT: Thank you so much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Are there any other questions from members of the committee?

If not, thank you very much for your time, and your excellent testimony, and your advocacy.

LIAM KELLS: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Andrea Estell. I called you mistakenly a minute ago, but your time is now, and you're to be followed by Jesse Burks.

ANDREA ESTELL: Liam is a tough act to follow.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Education Committee, my name is Andrea Estell, and I am the chairman of the Union Board of Education. Thank you for providing me an opportunity to support House Bill 5562, AN ACT CONCERNING SPECIAL EDUCATION.

Over a two-year period, Union special education population has increased significantly to 16 percent of its total student population. Given the number of students and the distribution of the necessary interventions, it is difficult, if not impossible, to qualify for Excess Cost Reimbursement under the current formula.

We must request an additional appropriation for the current fiscal year. The additional appropriation will result in a total budget increase of 14.3 percent over our Fiscal Year 2013 budget. This additional appropriation will cover an unanticipated 63 percent increase in special education costs. However, we still will not qualify for any reimbursement this fiscal year under the current structure.

Our budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2015 includes a 16 percent bottom line increase, with a 22 percent increase in budgeted special education expenditures. Under the current Excess Cost Reimbursement Formula, only expenditures for two of our students would qualify for reimbursement. The reimbursement would produce a 4.6 percent reduction in our proposed budget. However, the proposed three-

tier Excess Cost Formula would qualify expenditures for a third student for reimbursement. This reimbursement would result in a further reduction of our budget by 1.2 percent.

Our achievement level, small size, and the lack of a 40 percent poverty level severely limit our eligibility level for state grants. Our tax base is extremely limited. Two-thirds of our land area is tax-exempt with ownership split between Yale University School of Forestry, and State-owned forests for which we receive a pilot grant which has been steadily declining.

All of Connecticut's children need and should receive the services called for in their individualized education plan. The State needs to partner in supporting local districts financially as they strive to provide appropriate special programs. To date, the vast majority of costs have been borne locally. House Bill 5562 is a step in the right direction, and should be passed in this session.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for your testimony and your explanation of -- of the impacts on your school district. Given the role that you play in Union, I'm guessing that you may have met folks from Boards of Education in the surrounding towns. Do you have any sense as to whether the position you've just enunciated is one that's shared by some of the folks in your

neighboring towns, or -- or have you not had those conversations yet?

ANDREA ESTELL: The extreme -- the double-digit figures are something that seems to be particular to our town. At this point in time we've had a lot of new students moving into town which is, you know, causing a little bit of a change in our population, as well as the fact that we are such a small town. Numbers can get skewed in terms of, you know, the number of students, the population, etc. But from my understanding this is -- this is an issue.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Are there questions from other members of the committee? If not, thank you very much for your time, and your public service, and your advocacy.

ANDREA ESTELL: Thank you so much.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Jesse Burks, to be followed by Representative Brian Sear.

JESSE BURKS: Hello, my name is Jesse Burks. I -- dyslexia is not just reading. Dyslexia is not just spelling. Dyslexia is not who I am, but is a part of me.

HB5562

I love it when my mom reads to me. I love it to watch videos online or use Siri to read to me on my iPad. I love good stores and good books. I love to learn, just not at school, this school in CT. I like my school in CT. I like the people in my school too, but not the

learning part. That part is not fun because no one understands me -- no one understands me. In Texas I had a great teacher who was teaching me how to make sense of everything. For a long time it was hard, and then I met Ms. Acker and we did MTA.

In MTA I did reading and spelling. There were only four or five of us in the class and we went to her every single day, and it was so great. I learned so much about words and how they worked. Some of it I remembered, but not all because I only went for half a year before we moved to CT.

When we went back in my classroom with my friends, I could read all the book -- book club books and do all my tests, and we -- and when we took the tests, I even got commended in reading. That was awesome. In CT no one actually believes in dyslexia. No one wants to work with me like Ms. Acker did, and I don't know why. I am smart, and I have so many questions that I need to answer, but when it's time to read or write I just fake it. If I fake it, the teachers leave me alone. I tell them I don't understand. They only say yes you do; you are smart. They are not listening to me. Please help them listen to me.

My mom says this letter will help you understand how important it is to have dyslexia on my IEP so that someone will listen, and someone at school will work with me like in Texas. I want all my teachers to know the stuff -- know the stuff that Ms. Acker did.

She is very smart and made me know I am smart, too. Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: And Jesse, not only are you smart, you have an excellent sense of timing.

So I just want to understand. Your teachers now are aware of the fact that you were diagnosed with dyslexia? You can -- you can just leave -- touch the button again, and then you don't have to -- you can leave it alone. As long as the red light is on, we hear you. So they know that you have that diagnosis. Are you saying that in Connecticut, you don't get the kind of support that you got when you lived in Texas?

JESSE BURKS: Yes.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: And when you were in Texas, you had a special teacher who was an expert in dyslexia who was helping you?

JESSE BURKS: Yes, Ms. Acker.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: And here in Connecticut you don't have anyone who seems to understand the -- the special help that -- that --

JESSE BURKS: No.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: -- you would need for dyslexia? So are you doing things outside of school, because it seems like you're progressing very well academically. Are you -- are you doing

things outside of school with your family, or with special tutors, or something?

JESSE BURKS: My mom and Ms. Acker have helped me the whole way.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Well, you're to be commended to -- I mean, you read extremely well, and you are very smart, and always have been, and now they've figured out how to help make sure that that translates into your reading. So congratulations to you on all the strides that you've made. We're here to try and make sure that every child who's diagnosed with dyslexia gets the kind of support that you get Ms. Aker.

JESSE BURKS: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Are there other questions from members of the committee?

Senator Boucher.

SENATOR BOUCHER: Thank you very much, and thank you for your courage to come here today and do such a very fine job. I think what you have done is you've articulated very well and very clearly the frustration of many dyslexic children that suffer from the standpoint that they're bright, alert, and don't display obvious signs that they're having serious problems, and oftentimes even well-educated educators can't understand or accept the notion that there could be something very seriously wrong in the process. I know we've had many people go through the same thing that you have. Unfortunately, many

in the past have not had any kind of intervention. They didn't know what it was, and -- and didn't know what the term is. So this is important that you've come forward and been able to understand how you feel and what your experiences are, and hopefully this will be proof to this legislative process. So congratulations for a very good job today.

JESSE BURKS: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Are there other comments or questions for Jesse? If not, thank you very much for your time and your advocacy.

Representative Brian Sear, to be followed by Nicolas Dawley.

REP. SEAR: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and Distinguished Members of the Education Committee.

I'm here to speak on Raised Bill 5565, AN ACT CONCERNING THE MINIMUM BUDGET REQUIREMENT, and I am specifically addressing the needs of the Town of Hampton which are addressed in Section 1, Subsection 6 and 7 of the raised bill.

Hampton has its own school district. It's comprised of one elementary school. It shows membership in Regional District 11 with two other towns, Chaplin and Scotland, which Regional District comprises one school, Parish Hill High School. Hampton residents vote separately on proposed budgets for Region 11

REP. KOKORUDA: -- because it was just Hampton that voted that down three times.

REP. SEAR: Just Hampton. Right, because that's its own school district.

REP. KOKORUDA: Okay. All right. Thank you.

REP. SEAR: You're welcome.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Any other questions? If not, thank you again, Representative Sear.

REP. SEAR: Thank you very much.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Nicolas Dawley, to be followed by Roberto Fernandez. Nicolas, you're going to want to press a button in front of you to turn on that microphone. Good, and then go ahead and feel free to bend the microphone to be close to you so that we can hear you well.

NICOLAS DAWLEY: Thank you to the Education Committee for drafting the dyslexia legislation, and for giving me the chance to speak to you today. I support the HRB 5562. My mom wrote that part.

I am Nicolas Dawley, age eight, recently diagnosed with a reading -- reading disability, but I'd rather be called dyslexia -- dyslexic. I am in the third grade at Mohegan Elementary School in Uncasville. The reading decoding program I am in is called Imagine It. It is not helping me learn to read. My teacher told my mom that I have not made progress in reading in two years. My spelling tests are hard for

me, and I get most of the words wrong after studying all week. I bring a lot of my class work home to do as my homework because I cannot read as fast as my friends do. I cannot -- I do not mind reading out loud in front of my reading workshop group of three other kids. They know what is going on and they read like me. Maybe they are dyslexic, too. I never raise my hand to read in front of my regular class. Now I know why it is hard -- so hard for me to read. I am dyslexic. It is good to know why school is so hard for me.

Me and my friends in my reading workshop need your help. Reading is not getting easier for us, and we work hard in the Imagine It program every day. Please help kids like us. Thank you, again. Nicolas Dawley.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Nicolas. You did a great job in writing and then decoding that text. That was very nicely done, and -- and I know that it probably wasn't a fun idea for you to come in front of a whole bunch of people and read, and we really appreciate your willingness to do that. It's very brave and very helpful, and I do think it will help all of your friends who maybe are facing challenges similar to yours -- similar to yours with reading and dyslexia.

Are there questions from members of the committee?

Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA: Thank you, Madam -- Mr. Chairman. Great job, Nicolas. Just to ask you, the program you talk about, Imagine It, is that the only reading help program that you have in your school that you know about?

NICOLAS DAWLEY: Uh.

REP. KOKORUDA: Well do you know, does everybody you know that's having trouble at reading go to that same program?

NICOLAS DAWLEY: The whole school I think does the program.

REP. KOKORUDA: Pardon me. Say that again. I'm sorry.

NICOLAS DAWLEY: The whole school --

REP. KOKORUDA: The whole school?

NICOLAS DAWLEY: -- does -- does the program.

REP. KOKORUDA: Everyone does it? Everyone does the program?

NICOLAS DAWLEY: Yes.

REP. KOKORUDA: And you don't feel it is helping you?

NICOLAS DAWLEY: No.

REP. KOKORUDA: Do you have tutoring after school?

NICOLAS DAWLEY: No.

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REP. KOKORUDA: No, so just what you have in school. Are you taken out of class at all and teachers -- reading teachers work with you during school time?

NICOLAS DAWLEY: Yes. Uh-huh.

REP. KOKORUDA: Every day?

NICOLAS DAWLEY: Not every day.

REP. KOKORUDA: Well Nicolas you read beautifully today and did a great job. Thank you for coming.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Representative Cook also has a brief question for you.

REP. COOK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Hi, Nicolas. How are you?

NICOLAS DAWLEY: Good.

REP. COOK: You did a fantastic job, and I just want to say that we will do everything we can to help you out. I have a son who is now 14 who was diagnosed in second grade with dyslexia, and he struggled every day to try to keep up, and to read with his peers, and to make sure that nobody makes fun of him. So you keep your head up, and know that there's people over here that are trying to fight to make things better for you over there. And remember that you can do great things regardless of whatever you might have. You can turn it into being

somebody more special than what you are now, and change great lives, and you started today. So congratulations, and you did a great job.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Thank you, Nicolas, you are now free to roam about the country.

All right. Roberto Fernández, to be followed by Adam Glassman.

Is -- is Mr. Fernandez still here? If not, is -- is Adam Glassman still here? Adam, your moment in the spotlight has arrived.

ADAM GLASSMAN: Hi. My name is Adam Glassman. I'm ten years old. I live in Orange, Connecticut. I am here to speak in support of Bill RHB 5562, Section 1, to get dyslexia recognized in the state of Connecticut. I was diagnosed in kindergarten with a reading disability after my mom brought me to a doctor, but it wasn't until the end of third grade when I went back to the doctor that I found out that I was dyslexic. Reading, spelling, and writing have always been hard for me. Finding out that I have dyslexia helped me understand why I had so much trouble in school. I am really good at math and science, also I love (inaudible) and working on by Cub Scout requirements.

I started getting help by the reading teacher in the middle of kindergarten into the middle of first -- into -- into the middle of first grade. I started to go to Resource Room. The

Resource Room is a tiny room with less than ten kids in there at a time. The kids are working on reading, writing, and math. Sometimes the room is noisy and it's hard to concentrate. I always felt like my friends were reading better than me. My level -- my reading level hasn't improved enough to read the same books as my friends.

Teachers don't understand dyslexia. Teachers, they call me lazy, and sometimes I work harder than my friends when I'm doing my school work. Even though I'm really good at math, teachers put me in groups for extra help because they don't understand the way I work. I -- I'm put with kids who don't understand math at all. I have creative ways to figure out math. Even when I get the -- the right answers, teachers say I'm doing it wrong.

Writing has -- writing is hard for me, too. The ideas are in my head, but it's hard to write them down. My teachers don't realize some of the tricks I've used to keep up with my friends. I wish teachers understood dyslexia. All dyslectic kids should have a chance to get the right early teaching in school. Please help me and other kids like me to have -- help pass this bill, RHB 5562. Dyslexia needs to be recognized and teachers should have the proper training so they can help kids like me. Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. I don't only think teachers should have the proper training in order to be able to help students like you. I

think they should have the proper training to be able to read as well as you. That was a -- that was a tremendous job you did presenting that testimony, and we really appreciate it. Are there questions from members of the committee? If not, thank you very much and let me just say you have -- you do have a career available to you in speech writing and public speaking if you decide to pursue that road. Thank you very much for your time.

ADAM GLASSMAN: You're welcome.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Is Representative Ziobron here? You're up next, to be followed by Otto Leary Cahill.

Welcome.

REP. ZIOBRON: Thank you. I don't know if I can follow that -- that testimony, but I'm going to try my best.

Dear Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Boucher, and Representative Ackert, and esteemed members of the Education Committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to testify before you today. I'm here to support two separate bills.

The first is SB 473, AN ACT CONCERNING MAGNET SCHOOLS. This bill would require the parent or guardian of a student who will be enrolled in a magnet school, or whose name has been placed on a waiting list for a magnet school, to notify the School District in which such student

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alternative school programs, so thank you for your advocacy for that program and I look forward to moving this forward. Thank you.

SENATOR STILLMAN: It's come to -- first of all, this is the last of the students on the list. It's come to my attention there might be a few more who might like to speak. Zoe and Katie Howard? I was wondering what your names were. I've been staring at you most of the day. You've been very patient. Good job, mom.

MRS. HOWARD: We're here in support of Bill 5562 and Katie and Zoe wanted to say something.

SENATOR STILLMAN: What would you like to say?

ZOE HOWARD: My name is Zoe Howard. I'm six years old and I'm in first grade and I go to Bakerville Consolidated School, and I have dyslexia and (inaudible) you can help me.

KATIE HOWARD: My name is Katie Howard and I also go to Bakerville and I'm six years old, in the first grade. I hope you can help my sister and the other kids that have dyslexia.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you very much. I'm assuming you might be twins.

A VOICE: Yes.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Yeah. Who's older? By how many minutes, Mom?

MRS. BAKER: How many minutes?

A VOICE: Two.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Two minutes, whoa, that's a big sister then, that's right. And both the children have dyslexia?

MRS. HOWARD: No, just Zoe.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Just -- okay, just Zoe.

MRS. HOWARD: Yes, and we actually submitted testimony, but I don't think we're going to be able to stay because of the long wait and they're impatient, so thank you very much.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Well thank you. You have been very patient. Have fun at school. We are so glad you were here.

A VOICE: Thank you.

SENATOR STILLMAN: And of course we will read the testimony. We have lots of it, and we really appreciate all the input. And again, Mom, you did a great job. They were wonderful; they were wonderful. Good luck. Bye, girls.

A VOICE: Bye.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Love your bows.

Are there any other children here, or students that would like to testify on any other bills that are on our agenda today?

questions for the gentleman?

MARY ELLEN DONNELLY: Could we address one of the questions that came up when Representative Genga on the educational cost sharing?

SENATOR STILLMAN: If you'd like to respond to something that was stated earlier, that's fine.

MARY ELLEN DONNELLY: There was a question.

DR. PAUL GRASECK: There was a question from Representative Genga, and he wanted to know about the history of educational cost sharing in our district. And over the last four years, it has been remarkably stable within \$2,000 each year.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you for clarifying that. We appreciate it. Thank you both very much.

DR. PAUL GRASECK: Thank you.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Next is Dr. Louisa Spear-Swerling to be followed by Ray Rossomando and Craig Cooke.

Good afternoon.

DR. LOUISE SPEAR-SWERLING: Good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

I am here today to speak in support of HRB 5562 Section 1 on dyslexia. My name is Louise Spear-Swerling, and I am a researcher and teacher educator at Southern who has helped prepare both general and special educators to teach reading for many years. I've been involved in the development of numerous state education policies, including writing of the state's current guidelines for identification of specific learning disabilities.

My colleagues and I have studied teachers' knowledge base about reading for over a decade, and I consult widely in Connecticut schools on cases of students with dyslexia. So I have a strong sense of what Connecticut educators typically know about dyslexia, based both upon research and my professional experience. Unfortunately, too often what educators know about dyslexia is not much.

Dyslexia is the most common and well-researched type of specific learning disability. In fact, current state guidelines already explicitly include dyslexia on page 50, as a distinct type of learning disability associated with difficulties in accurate and fluent single-word decoding skills, typically associated with difficulties in phonological processing, that is processing speech sounds in words. This definition is highly consistent with those used in the scientific community. The document goes on to briefly describe appropriate identification measures for these students as well as their need for intensive, systematic teaching of phonics. I know that these words are there because I wrote them.

Regrettably, however, awareness of dyslexia in our public schools and even colleges of education is still very limited. If children with dyslexia are lucky enough to have parents with the financial means and educational savvy to advocate for them, those children often get the help they need, though not always promptly enough to provide the best possible outcomes. But children whose parents lack financial means or educational savvy can have dyslexia too, and often those children receive the wrong kind of help or no help at all.

This lack of awareness is especially tragic

because effective approaches to early identification and intervention in dyslexia are very well understood. Furthermore, many struggling readers who would not meet formal criteria for dyslexia could also benefit from these approaches.

Specifying dyslexia as one type of SLD on the IEP form is certainly a step in the right direction because it could help to increase awareness of dyslexia while still making clear that children identified with dyslexia must meet SLD criteria; something I believe is vitally important.

Another critical step involves professional development for educators, so that they have an accurate understanding of dyslexia when they consider checking that box on the IEP. Most educators truly want to help children, and they are eager for this information. I urge you to provide for this kind of research-based professional development.

Thank you for your recognition of these important issues and your willingness to act on the behalf of Connecticut's teachers and schoolchildren.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you very much, and thank you for all your work in this area as well. I noticed attached to your testimony are a long list of references. So that's helpful to all of us as we look into this issue.

Does anyone have any questions? Representative Fleischmann followed by Representative Kokoruda.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you very much for your testimony.

Do you have any sense as we sit here today what

percentage of children, if there were proper diagnostic tools being used to cross the grades, would be diagnosed with dyslexia?

DR. LOUISE SPEAR-SWERLING: Prevalence estimates for dyslexia vary a lot. In my opinion, the more conservative estimates around maybe 5 percent of a total school population are probably correct. Those are estimates that assume that children are getting high quality general education instruction, so that we're not identifying children who are basically curriculum casualties, who didn't have the appropriate teaching.

Under those conditions, we're probably still talking about, you know, every year a typical classroom teacher has at least one dyslexic child. Multiplied across all of the teachers in a school year after year, it's still a lot of children.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: I think everyone would agree that is a high level of prevalence.

So then my next question is for the typical teacher preparation program, do they not have some basic curricular requirement related to identification and addressing of dyslexia?

DR. LOUISE SPEAR-SWERLING: For general education preparation in my experience and based on the research I've seen, general educators get little to no preparation in that area. They've often heard the term, but they don't know what it is. They often have antiquated views. They think it involved, you know, children who see letters and words backwards.

Even the teacher educators often are not knowledgeable enough to teach the students scientifically accurate information about how to help these children. That's very common, and the general education teacher is the first point of

contact. So even if you have a special educator who is knowledgeable and effective, it's the general educator who has to be able to recognize these problems in order to get early identification.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Absolutely. Well, thank you. That's very helpful, and I am now planning to have a discussion with friends on a higher education committee about teacher preparation in this area as well because it doesn't make any sense to me that we would have someone who's graduating recently from a teacher prep program not prepared to identify and address the challenge of one or two children in their classroom every year. It just doesn't make any sense.

DR. LOUISE SPEAR-SWERLING: I completely agree.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you very much.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you, sir. Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Dr. Spear-Swerling, I have to thank you today, you know. I'm just in my fourth year here, and I think today has been one of the biggest eye openers. Something we've all heard of, dyslexia, and to hear what children in our state are dealing with and parents are dealing with has been shocking today to say the least; and I think most the people at this table would agree that we've let it go this far.

I have a grandson with autism, and once he was diagnosed, services started for him. And I advocate for the autism community all the time, and autism is a relatively new phenomena as far as what we know about it. I remember going to

school with kids that were -- I was told they had dyslexia. It is amazing.

Why do you think Connecticut has been -- or maybe Connecticut is one of many, many states. Why are we so far behind with identifying these children and getting them the help they need?

DR. LOUISE SPEAR-SWERLING: There's probably, you know, multiple reasons for that. Again, our state guidelines for LP do provide, you know. It's in there, but, unfortunately, whenever you do this sort of policy document, you know, you have a 100-page document. Not everybody reads the whole document, or really understands the entire document, or has the professional preparation to take that and translate it into, you know, action in the classroom.

So I think that we have certain -- the current guidelines that are in place clearly do encompass these children, but what we have is a problem of awareness; and to some extent, you know, also, the knowledge base to effectively -- you know, effective early identification and effective early intervention.

REP. KOKORUDA: Now, unlike autism, which young children today are typically diagnosed prior to going into public school --

DR. LOUISE SPEAR-SWERLING: Right.

REP. KOKORUDA: -- and I know this is different because quite often people don't realize it until the children is learning to read.

But it just is pretty shocking that -- like when children are given a plan in school, any child that needs special attention, isn't there anybody on that team, that PPT program, that is picking up that what this child really needs as

far as training, or what are we missing with that?

DR. LOUISE SPEAR-SWERLING: You know, there are some schools that are doing it well. So it's not that there aren't any schools like that. The problem is we're not doing it on a systemic basis. So if schools are using the right kinds of universal screening, very important with this population, for example, that you use a measure that asks children to read out of context nonsense words like gleck, g-l-e-c-k, words that the child has to decode and cannot recognize by sight are going to be more sensitive to the core deficit in dyslexia.

Schools should be asking about things like is there a family history of dyslexia; does the child have a history of early language delay, which we know is a precursor, an important precursor, not only of dyslexia but other reading problems. Those are things that some schools are attentive to, but many schools are not, unfortunately.

REP. KOKORUDA: Well, thank you for all your work on this, and we've certainly heard a message here today. Thank you so much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

DR. LOUISE SPEAR-SWERLING: My pleasure.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Representative Giuliano, did you have a question?

REP. GIULIANO: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Just go right ahead.

REP. GIULIANO: Thank you very much. Dr. Spear-Swerling, nice to have you here with us.

My question to you is if it is the intent of this legislation to increase awareness and to do that in a direct and systemic way, why the focus on adding a category of exceptionality to the IEP paperwork? That is -- that I don't fully understand, if I'm understanding your systemic and direct intent.

DR. LOUISE SPEAR-SWERLING: I think that having the category on the IEP form, especially as a subcategory of learning disabilities because dyslexia is a type of learning disability, but specifying it, you know, would raise awareness, would draw people's attention to the term. But even more useful than that would be professional development for teachers so that they understand what it is, and they know about effective intervention when they're considering whether a child has dyslexia.

REP. GIULIANO: Thank you. I appreciate that, and I would like to align my comments with those with Chairman Fleischmann because I'm wondering about the best approach to further the aim that you're promulgating here today.

Also, you know, when we look at the new DSM-5, you know, how it has taken specific learning disability and created an overarching development kind of category for conceptualizing this. I mean, if that's insufficient, I'm just wondering how a label on a form is going to help.

And clearly when you listen to stories from families and practitioners, we do need to do some help, but I'm just wondering if the committee might consider a different consideration for getting toward that end, one that might have greater efficacy to really address what you and so many people are speaking about today.

Madam Chair, thank you very much for the opportunity.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you, Representative.
Anyone else? Yes, Representative Cook.

REP. COOK: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Doctor, for your information and your insight. My question kind of aligns with a couple but to go another step further. And so a few years back we had actually legislated and we did a task force on the IEP to change the way the boxes were filled out for this specific conversation, for dyslexic children. We got pushback from the State Department of Education stating that it wasn't going to make a difference whether we put the little check box there, or a teacher would fill out OHI and then fill in dyslexia.

What I have found within the several students that I know that have dyslexia is that the districts are afraid to actually acknowledge it because they don't have anybody in their district that is capable or trained to educate or help the child. So I hear all the little yeses.

So my question is, to be able to go that one step further, which I would have liked to have seen happen six years ago, how do we get the State Board of Education to understand that this is a significant problem, and that the students that really need our help the most are the ones that we're failing the most; and that this is something as the students age and do get the appropriate education and help can, not necessarily grow out of it, but adapt? How do we go about this?

DR. LOUISE SPEAR-SWERLING: You know, honestly, I'm not sure I have a good answer for that. I mean, I think that, again this is how the State Department of Ed. probably sees it. The information is there in the document, and, you know, the problem though is that when you have lots and lots of information, schools are not necessarily attending to, you know, page 50 of the document, which is where the information is; and you kind of need things that will draw people's attention.

So if you have something they check off on the IEP form that draws people's attention, I think that has some utility, although even, again, the professional development aspect for public school teachers and administrators I think is very important.

Again, there are some people who are knowledgeable, but in my consulting work I see all the time, you know, children who could have been identified earlier with better or early screening measures, could have had better, more prompt early intervention, that kind of thing.

REP. GIULIANO: Thank you for your answer. Thank you, Madam Chair. I do think I agree with Chairman Fleischmann that we need to talk to our colleagues at looking at higher education because this is a crisis that we need to fix. Thank you.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you, Representative. Thank you very much, Doctor.

DR. LOUISE SPEAR-SWERLING: My pleasure.

SENATOR STILLMAN: I appreciate it. Ray Rossomando to be followed by Craig Cooke. Is Craig Cooke here? He had to leave as well. Okay. Rose Reyes. Okay. You'll follow Mr. Rossomando and

then Richard Murray.

Welcome.

RAY ROSSOMANDO: Welcome. Thank you.

Good afternoon, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Ray Rossomando. I'm the Research and Policy Development Specialist with the Connecticut Education Association. I'm accompanied today with Bob Namnoum, who serves as a UniServ Representative for the CEA, working in the northwest quadrant, and has also served on the MORE Commission Special Education Select Working Group.

HBSS102
HBSS106
HBSS107

We testifying on five bills, so I'm going to summarize my testimony, which we submitted in written form.

With respect to Senate Bill 472, State Funding for Education regarding the Budgets of Boards of Education. We're pleased to see the reaffirmation of the non-supplant clause, as it would apply to Alliance districts. We understand that are some circumstances where there's a question about how much of alliance funds can be used elsewhere in the local budge, and we are glad to see this language here confirming that it should go to Alliance districts.

Regarding Senate Bill 476 and the Academic Achievement Gap, CEA supports Section 2, which extends bilingual program duration from 30 months to 60.

We also support expanding full-day kindergarten into every district in the state. Unequal access to full-day kindergarten means some

children start first grade further behind their peers in neighboring districts. We think this is essentially unequal, and it should not be the case.

We do remain concerned that Alliance districts will not receive sufficient ECS funding to carry out their Alliance district plans, whether they include plans with full-day kindergarten or not. We do know that the plans ask them to do a lot, and we're not sure that the ECS funding, which is related to the underfunding, is really commensurate what their undertaking to meet those Alliance plans. And so we hope the Education Committee perhaps looks at other innovative ways of creating incentives for districts that don't currently have full-day kindergarten to offer it.

With respect to House Bill 5562, special education, we strongly support the efforts of Senator Osten, reflected in Sections 1 and 2, which designates dyslexia as a specific disability on the IEP forms.

As we've already heard a little bit, dyslexia is the most common form of learning disability, resulting in what we have found in some research to be 18 to 20 percent of children struggling to read. I know this contrasts somewhat with the 5 percent figure noted before. Ours related to Dr. Lion and the NIH, but these estimates are all over the map.

But because of this prevalence and related struggles parents encounter when seeking proper diagnosis and needed services, we believe it is appropriate to add dyslexia to the list of eligible special education disabilities.

CEA does not support Section 3 regarding the excess cost as written. It appears to

potentially be problematic. It doesn't appear to address certain aspects of excess costs.

We also recognize that there was an ECS task force that addressed special education funding, and the MORE Commission has been doing some work on special education funding as well; and we didn't see those reflected in that bill.

With respect to 5565, the minimum budget requirement, we would like to see this strengthened in MBR so that money can't be diverted from our schools.

HBSS17

And then, finally, on the alternative schools bill, we believe in the promotion of equal opportunity to high quality alternative education programs. We do remain concerned that high quality, high standards are maintained, so these do not become second class schools or potential for tracking; and that they are comparable to local public schools in terms of quality and outcomes.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you very much.

Do you wish -- are you just going to say ditto, or are you -- would you like to --

BOB NAMNOUM: I'm just another pretty face.

SENATOR STILLMAN: That is not permanently in the record, sir. So if anybody challenges it, they'll have to look in the record.

Questions anyone? Yes, Representative Fleischmann to be followed by Representative Ackert.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

One quick question on the very last thing you

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ROSE REYES: I have great confidence that when this state allows our children to learn in the language that they know best, we'll produce critical thinking, literate, bi-literate, bicultural students who have the ability to participate in English-only classes with great confidence because they have a knowledge base that they were allowed to create in their first language. And so, yes, I think it's worth the investment.

I have seen my students after 30 months. I know they're not ready, and yet they have to take the mastery test. And they score poorly, and it's a poor reflection on themselves, and they feel bad; and the districts get blamed, and the teachers get blamed when all along we have set ourselves up for that failure with the 30 months. That's what I discovered.

REP. JOHNSON: Thank you so much for your testimony, the passion you bring to this. Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you, Representative. Anyone else? Thank you.

ROSE REYES: Thank you.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Next is Richard Murray.

RICHARD MURRAY: Good afternoon.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Welcome, sir.

RICHARD MURRAY: Representative Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, members of the Ed. Committee. My name is Richard Murray, and I am a member of the Killingly Board of Ed. and president of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education.

HB5562

I appreciate the opportunity to address the many education bills you have today, which we have submitted testimony on.

I would just like to briefly add to HB 5562 and how it's effecting my local district and the districts around me in Northeast Connecticut. We will benefit substantially from the proposed revision of the excess aid formula for local placements to allow a percentage reimbursement.

Currently, as you know, we qualify for excess aid for local placement of the student only when the cost of the student exceeds four and a half times our general per student, which in Killingly is \$63,000.

And just to add, most of our placements are in the \$60,000 range, which obviously we would get no reimbursement for, but under the proposed formula, Killingly would get about 17,000 per student.

And I would just like to urge the Legislature to fully fund whatever formula it adopts. A 77 percent funding rate compromises our budget and many others substantially. Thank you.

Under the time limit.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Yeah. I think you get the prize today, so thank you.

RICHARD MURRAY: Well, it's been a long day for everybody.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Questions anyone? Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: I'll just say, not only under the time limit, Richard, but also in support of a bill that I've been pushing for about five

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years.

RICHARD MURRAY: I'm well aware of that, sir.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Much appreciated. And if it were fully funded, would I be right in thinking that this tiered approach would sort of provide assistance for more of the students to whom your district provides special education because you have some who are in one band, and some who are in the next band, and so forth?

RICHARD MURRAY: Absolutely.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you.

RICHARD MURRAY: Thank you.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you, sir. Any other questions? Thank you.

RICHARD MURRAY: Thank you very much. Enjoy the rest of your day.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you. You too. Next is Steven Hernandez to be followed by Dawn Learcy and Melodie Peters.

STEVEN HERNANDEZ: I want to win a prize too, so I'll be brief.

SENATOR STILLMAN: And that's without knowing what the prize is. That's a very brave man.

STEVEN HERNANDEZ: I'll be careful too.

Good afternoon, Honorable Co-Chairs, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, ranking and other esteem members of the Education Committee. My name is Steven Hernandez, attorney and director of Public Policy and Research for the Connecticut Committee on

HB5564

STEVEN HERNANDEZ: Sure.

REP. KOKORUDA: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you, Representative.
Anyone else? Thank you.

STEVEN HERNANDEZ: You're welcome.

SENATOR STILLMAN: I appreciate it. Dawn Learcy.
Is Dawn Learcy here? Shelley Pelletier.

SHELLEY PELLETIER: Chairman Fleischmann, Chairman Stillman, and all Education Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to come in on RHB 5562, Section 1, about dyslexia.

I am a board certified school psychologist and clinical neuropsychologist in private practice, and I work with children who have a wide range of educational, social, and emotional difficulties. Many of these children have reading disabilities.

Although the term dyslexia is presently included in educational law, many schools fail to acknowledge or intervene with students who have dyslexia, perhaps because it is seen as an isolated problem or because staff members are not trained in methods to effectively identify the condition and provide appropriate treatments.

Dyslexia is a term that's used to describe students who display a particular pattern of reading impairment. It is not the only type of reading disability, and the term should not be used to classify all students with reading problems.

As you've heard earlier today, dyslexia is a

term that accurately describes a subset of students with impairments in word decoding, spelling, and reading fluency. It is not characterized by writing or reading letters backwards, which is a common misperception.

Typically students with dyslexia have specific impairments in phonological processing. The presentation of these students may vary over time as a function of development, yet the term dyslexia may continue to accurately describe their difficulties.

Reports from the International Dyslexia Association indicates that 13 to 14 percent of the school age population qualifies for special education across categories. Their report suggests that 6 to 7 percent of those students are classified as having a learning disabilities, and they report that about 85 percent of those students have a learning disabilities in reading and language processing.

In contrast, they also report that about 15 to 20 percent of the general population shows some symptoms of dyslexia.

The IDA further suggests that less than a third of students with reading disabilities actually receive intervention in school for their condition.

While having an additional box on an IEP may enable documentation of students who have already been identified, it does not serve to help school staff members recognize struggling readers who may have dyslexia.

Early identification is known to be critical and reduce functional impairments and the development of additional problems.

Regrettably, I have seen multiple cases in which clear deficits were not formally identified until middle or high school. Unfortunately, I'm also aware of several cases where school districts have encouraged parents to obtain external evaluations at their own expense, as they claim that dyslexia is a medical condition that could not be identified by school personnel.

I have also seen several students with clear evidence of dyslexia denied appropriate services because they were demonstrating progress, albeit minimal progress, via the response to intervention model.

While I commend the legislation for beginning to promote awareness of dyslexia among educational professionals, I believe that further modification of this bill is warranted. The mere addition of a box to identify a condition that can already be classified via an existing category does not advance the needs of students with dyslexia.

Further clarification of their condition and requirements to provide staff education and training to identify the condition would be more beneficial. Moreover, the legislation should be designed to advance the understanding of reading disabilities in general and at the same time clearly highlight the need for identification of appropriate services for all students with reading disabilities, including those with dyslexia.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today, and I'm available for further questions.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you very much. We appreciate it. We do have copies of your

belabor it, but we will be looking at your testimony.

MELODIE PETERS: I appreciate it.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you. Any other questions?
Yes. Representative Johnson.

REP. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you today for all your work on this issue. It's much appreciated in bringing it to the attention of the Education Committee. I just want to thank you for working with us on making some of these recommendations.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

MELODIE PETERS: Thank you, Representative Johnson.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you. Good to see you again. Thank you very much.

Mary Maloney. Is Mary here? Tracy Lay. Oh, we go through this. We're going to get through quite a few names this way. Okay. Certainly if they come back, hopefully they will let us know that they have returned.

Karima Robinson. There she is. Patricia Charles. Is Patricia Charles -- good. You will be next and Michelle Ducette-Cunningham to follow.

Karima Robinson, welcome.

KARIMA ROBINSON: Good afternoon, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Stillman, and members of the Education Committee.

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My name is Karima Robinson. I am a tutor for Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven. I am

also an independent scholar, educator, advocate, and theatre artist. I have over 10 years of teaching experience at the college level, and I am a dyslexic adult. I am proof that children do not grow out of dyslexia. We learn to compensate and struggle to create productive lives for ourselves.

I am here today to ask you to modify the RHB 5526 -- see, I'm flipping the numbers already - 5562, Section 1, an act concerning special education in three ways.

The first is that it be listed as a specific learning disability, and SLD. I am also here to request an individual education program, IEP, for the SLD dyslexics and to request the adoption of a universal definition of dyslexia, which will facilitate understanding of dyslexia and lead to more rapid interventions.

And finally, I am here to request training and professional development for teachers and educators at all levels on how to identify dyslexia and educate the children who have it.

Students can and should be identified in the early elementary school years. The earlier a student is identified and treated for dyslexia, the easier it is to correct this condition. As the student matures, she finds ways to compensate or avoid situations where her symptoms are exposed. Her dyslexia is then compounded by the many "tricks" that she learns to cover or mask her symptoms. This makes the educator's task of correcting dyslexia more challenging.

So I am requesting that the bill be modified to acknowledge that dyslexia falls under the category of an SLD disability.

I am also asking -- I'm going to skip through some of it because it has been stated a couple times today about the definition of dyslexia.

Dyslexia manifests itself in a variety of ways. The attributes go beyond reading to include difficulties with spelling, math, handwriting, ADD, ADHD, memory, coordination, balance, motor skills, timing, and the brain's compass function. Each individual will have a different grouping and severity of symptoms.

There are also different theories about the root causes of dyslexia and how to treat it. Some specialists believe that it is an inner-ear problem, while others blame a unique visual-thinking ability that make us extremely creative.

In spite of the complexity of dyslexia and the many variations, a universal definition will facilitate -- okay. I'm going to skip to the end.

Just to make the point, I work with Literacy Volunteers of New Haven, and we have an illiteracy rate in the adult population. The modifications I'm asking you to consider will go a long way in achieving this goal. If we can identify and correct this issue in children, we can drastically reduce the illiteracy rate among future adults.

Improving reading comprehension, writing, and math skills in children will reduce high-school dropout rates. It will also reduce crime rates and the numbers of people living at or below the poverty line.

Literate adults acquire better jobs and are better employees. They keep their families healthy. They make greater contributions to

their communities.

I'll stop there because you have my testimony.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you very much. Thank you. We appreciate your input, and thank you for the work that you do as well.

Questions anyone? Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you very much for your testimony. I must say that you really demonstrate that, with proper training, someone with dyslexia can do anything they want. This testimony is extremely thorough, and the way you delivered it. If you hadn't said, "I'm a dyslexic adult," there's no way that I or anyone in the room would ever have known the struggles that you detail.

I just have one question about your suggestion regarding an IEP form. So what our bill suggests is that it be specifically identified. Once it's identified, my understanding of state and federal statute is that it must be addressed. Is your suggestion that in addition to it being addressed, that there is a special sort of protocol for how it's addressed? Is that what would be implied by having a separate IEP form?

KARIMA ROBINSON: No. I'm sorry. That's probably a mistake on my part. I'm suggesting that there be a special box for SLD dyslexia on the identified form, and that following that would be training and professional development for teachers and administrators.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for that clarification. It's very helpful.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Okay. Anyone else? Thank you

Is Cindy Bankoski here? Welcome.

CYNTHIA BANKOSKI: Hi. I brought my emotional support here with me.

Representative Fleischmann, Representative Stillman, and members of the Education Committee, my daughter Sarah and I are here to speak in support of bill 5562.

I submitted my written testimony, which gives you a more detailed look into our experience, but I would like to add comment here.

I am the parent of a 10th grade dyslexic student residing in Haddam, and am concerned with the lack of training and resources necessary to identify and remediate dyslexia in young school children.

I am a parent of a dyslexic. Years ago I did not want to accept this. I thought that dyslexia meant that there was an inability to learn.

Through much turmoil and research, I now understand that dyslexia is real, and it affects 20 percent of our nation's population. Dyslexics are extremely bright and can be taught to read, and are most successful when afforded certain accommodations that level the playing field.

This learning disability is almost four times more prevalent than Autism, yet the individuals who are trusted to identify this in our children do not have adequate training to recognize the signs, have difficulty identifying appropriate and meaningful interventions, and fail to recognize their obligation under the Child Find law to pursue a

comprehensive reading evaluation when a child is not making adequate progress in gaining proficiency in reading.

My daughter had many, many of the warning signs, and my district has come a great way in recognizing this issue.

It sounds relatively benign when you're told that your child isn't learning to read the first year. Nothing to worry about you're told. They'll get it. The second year, your child gets more of the same instruction, just in a smaller group, and it is now that you begin to see your child that you knew begin to slip away. Before you know it, your child is feeling worthless and you have no idea what to do or how to help.

There are no words to adequately express to you the level of fear, isolation, lack of understanding, anxiety, and pain that a parent feels at watching your child endure this day after day in school, watching as the beautiful soul of your child sinks further and further into anxiety, self-doubt, self-loathing, and despair. After all, the first thing that you're asking them to do at school is to learn to read, and they're already failing at it. And the professionals are acting as if they should already know how to do it.

Ask any parent of a second grade dyslexic student what their household looks like and sounds like in the evenings, and they will undoubtedly tell you or describe it to you as sounding like Armageddon.

It is unconscionable to me that we continue to allow these children to be placed under such duress and turmoil simply because of a lack of training and a clear up-to-date definition of

what dyslexia actually is, when there is a preponderance of evidence that supports that the right approach can and absolutely does work. Dyslexic children have equal right under IVA to be appropriately identified and have their specific educational needs met as any other child in our school.

Having a specific box for dyslexic students on their IEP will ensure that the goals and objectives chosen for remediation specifically target the five foundational areas that research tell us are critical in the development of reading proficiency.

Currently, under the umbrella of SLD, these goals and objectives often are too vague and have no basis in proven foundational areas of instruction necessary for these children to gain proficiency in reading.

The emotional scars from this kind of turmoil in a child's early life run deep, and they rewrite on the canvas of who that child was meant to be, forever changing it.

I will never truly know the extent of my daughter's scars, but I know now that because my daughter is dyslexic, she will find her own path and even better solutions to her problems; and she will become an even better version of herself. She only needed to be given wings and, by being explicitly taught to read, a chance to learn to fly.

I know through research that my future grandchildren have a higher chance of struggling with dyslexia than other students, and it's for them that I sit here before you today. I cannot bear the thought of years from now going through with my grandchildren what I went through with my daughter, and knowing we

had the chance today and sat on the sidelines and didn't do everything that we could to make a difference.

We support House Bill No. 5562. It takes a small step in the right direction towards righting the wrongs that these children face in school every day, but it is simply a drop in the bucket compared to what we need to be doing.

Thank you for allowing me to speak, and Sarah and I will be happy to answer any questions.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for your testimony and for your candor too. I'm sure those nights of trying to get the homework done are not easy. I know what it's like with a child who has not been identified as, you know, special needs, but as far as I can tell, every child is special needs. It's just a question of what are those needs.

And so, anyhow, we appreciate your candor and your help on this.

Are there questions from members of the committee? Representative Miller.

REP. MILLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for your testimony.

I'm curious. At what age was your daughter identified as dyslexic?

CYNTHIA BANKOSKI: My daughter, I finally got the school to be able to provide her with the education that she needed to learn to read, which they did, in fifth grade. And it was finally decided that she was dyslexic in seventh grade.

REP. MILLER: So did you have to go higher and outside resource to make that determination?

CYNTHIA BANKOSKI: Yes. I actually pursued an outside evaluation that I paid for myself at the end of the third grade going into fourth grade. It took me all of fourth grade year to convince the parties what needed to be done.

REP. MILLER: Was there anyone in the school system that maybe suggested that your daughter was dyslexic?

CYNTHIA BANKOSKI: At the time there was nobody that really seemed to have that understanding. I had asked several times if they thought that that was the case, and I really didn't get anywhere.

REP. MILLER: I thank you for your testimony. I had a 40-plus-year-old constituent contact me last year who said that they were diagnosed with dyslexia. He still cannot read, and he's taken advantage of quite often because he has to hire people, count on other people, to read for him and to handle his business.

So I thank you for him, for coming up to testify so that we can shed light on this issue because it is very important, and we have people that are older, in their 30s and 40s, who still cannot read and cannot get the resources to read. So thank you very much.

CYNTHIA BANKOSKI: Representative, I might add that the difference between now and then is that we have the research to prove that they can be taught to read, and that they can excel. And we're just not giving them the opportunity.

REP. MILLER: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Any other questions? If not, thank you again for your time and patience with testimony. I extend that to both of you.

Now, I'm going to exercise the sort of prerogative of the Chair because that was a mother-child combination. You know, it's getting late in the day.

So I see a young boy in the front row who looks like he probably would rather be doing other things, but am I right in thinking -- yeah. So if you'd both like to come forward, I'm going to potentially free you both from the bonds of this building.

ANGELA HICKMANN: Thank you very much.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: If you could tell me your name and what number you were, we'll make the adjustment.

ANGELA HICKMANN: Sure. Angela Hickmann, number 54.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: I'm sorry. Your number was 54.

ANGELA HICKMANN: 54.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: So I only skipped you by one, sorry. I should have taken action sooner. My apologies. And, Angela, your son's name is?

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ANGELA HICKMANN: This is my oldest son, Carm, but I am here and we are here in support of my third grade son who is dyslexic; but I did leave him home so that he can have a routine day. But thank you for allowing me this opportunity.

In addition to being the mom of dyslexic, I am also a certified reading teacher. I am a veteran teacher, and it was because of my

background and experience that I recognized the struggles that my younger son was having in first grade.

I had him privately evaluated, which was \$3,500, and at that time the school system did not recognize a private evaluation.

As second grade went on, I asked them to administer a nonsense word test. It was at that time that he was entered into the Response to Intervention Program. And then I had to hire an advocate to help me navigate through the PPT system. So it was just this August that my son was evaluated and entered into special education, but that's only where the story begins.

So I'm going to fast forward to last week in the interest of time.

The school has the data on the children. They know what level they're at. My son is going to be ending third grade at a first grade decoding level.

Last week he came home from school with a book that he really wanted to read, but his teacher told him to take it home. He couldn't read it. He had to read (inaudible).

And his teacher puts her heart and soul into every student she has. I believe that if she had the right training, the appropriate methodology at her disposal, that she would have agreed that my son's two-hour PPT just this past Friday to allow him the appropriate accommodations like access to audio books, but I was denied. I asked if he could use a calculator. I was denied. I was told he was making progress, yet at the same time they were asking to increase his services, which would

further isolate him from his non-disabled peers.

I asked if I could go in and observe his program, just one lesson. I was denied. I asked if I hired a reading consultant to go in, and I was denied. I drafted my letter to revoke my consent (crying) -- sorry -- for special education because I don't know what to do.

But I do believe that if we had professional development mandates, administrators would make sure that the teachers were prepared and were implementing the appropriate methodology that you have heard about today.

His IQ is indexed in the superior range. His verbal comprehension is also indexed in the superior range. This is a child who can learn and wants to learn.

And my older son wanted to come to be a part of this, to support the process so that you can enact some legislation so that students like my son can be identified earlier, and that he may be able to get the right kind of reading instruction in school. Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. I appreciate your patience and coming forward with your story.

So other members of the committee may have questions. I'm just going to ask that when you're finished, if you could provide some contact information to the folks who are sitting at that little table over there. I think, you know, the Education Committee would like to sort of do some follow-up with you and the District of Westport to see what's going on and check in on that.

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ANGELA HICKMANN: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Other questions for the witness?
Senator Stillman.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Yes. Thank you.

Thank you very much for being here, and now I really understand why you brought your support network over there because you couldn't have a better one.

What is your name? It's good to meet you.
Doing a good job.

In terms of your denial of access to the classroom or materials, things like that, do you know if other parents have received the same kind of treatment?

ANGELA HICKMANN: I'm unaware of how other parents -
- yeah.

SENATOR STILLMAN: It's sort of interesting, as I listen to the parents today, I wonder if each district should have a support network so parents can -- I know there are support networks out there. I'm very much aware of that, but -- so that parents -- you know, there's strength in numbers as well, and maybe some support network within the district would be helpful.

But in terms of your son's teacher, is she -- could you -- and I don't mean this to sound -- I'm not looking for age discrimination, but do you know if she is a recently certified teacher?

ANGELA HICKMANN: She's been teaching about as long as I have, which is about 20 years.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Okay. And the reason I ask is that as we are receiving testimony today, we're hearing more and more about the fact that there is nothing in the curriculum for the teachers, and so that's why I was wondering whether there is something going on that we're not aware of; and a younger teacher might have -- you know, someone who may have been certified within the last five years or so might have had exposure. It doesn't sound as though that is the case, and I know in Connecticut we do have very experienced teachers; and I'm grateful for that, but obviously we've really missed the boat in this particular area.

So we all wish your son the best.

ANGELA HICKMANN: Thank you.

SENATOR STILLMAN: And if you are taking him -- having made this choice to take him out of the special ed. program, what is it that you plan to do?

ANGELA HICKMANN: I don't know. I haven't submitted my letter. I will be following up with his advocate, who has been wonderful. So I have this at home, and I continue to think about it. So I don't know just yet until I talk to her.

SENATOR STILLMAN: You know, I feel relatively confident to say when we pass this legislation, not yet, but when we do in terms of recognizing the problems that we have and what we can do to address it, if we are to pass some legislation that could be effective in the fall -- obviously depending on how it's worded, but certainly the fact that there needs to be identification to start with; there are lots of other things that need to be done -- would that change your mind at all in terms of taking him out of the program?

ANGELA HICKMANN: If I was assured that he would get the appropriate program to remediate his dyslexia, then I would absolutely keep him in. He's also required to attend speech and language three days a week at 45 minutes a session that he does not qualify for.

So he was entered based on a few subtests. When I questioned that, I also had him evaluated by Dr. Donna Geffner out in Long Island, and her data did not confirm the school's data. Yet at the two-hour PPT, the decision was that he must remain in those services. So that, in part, informed my decision that with five PPTs held just this school year, what else is a parent to do?

SENATOR STILLMAN: So the speech therapy has already been identified as not an issue? I mean, he doesn't need it?

ANGELA HICKMANN: He doesn't need it, and he -- they initially entered him based on a few subtests that the speech and language pathologist did in the beginning of the school year. And then when we revisited that data in that he was entered based solely on subtests and reviewed the guidelines of the speech and language, which I did myself just to educate myself, I noticed that, in fact, he does not qualify; but that was dismissed at his PPT on Friday.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you very much. We really appreciate your sharing with us. I know it's not easy, and we all get emotional when we speak of our children. So we do appreciate you being here.

ANGELA HICKMANN: Thank you very much.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Are there other questions from

members of the committee? Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon and thank you for coming and sharing that with us. It is not something that you hear that often in Westport, and it's valuable to hear what you've been through.

May I ask you which school your son attends? We can talk about it afterwards if you prefer?

ANGELA HICKMANN: Yeah. And it's my younger son who's home. I have my older son here for moral support.

REP. LAVIELLE: Okay. We can talk about that afterwards.

But it's been very interesting today to hear all sorts of types of situations. We've heard about, in some cases, misdiagnosis of what the issue is. We've heard in other cases about there just wasn't anything that triggered the effort really to investigate what the issue was until much later in the child's school career.

And in this case, if I'm hearing you correctly, it's yes. It was identified as dyslexia, but the way to address it seems to be misdirected or misguided. It doesn't seem to be effected, and doesn't seem to be tailored to the situation at hand.

And also, if I understood correctly, that when certain services have been offered to him, they've been so excessive that they've taken him away from the social context.

ANGELA HICKMANN: And his classmates.

REP. LAVIELLE: And he hasn't been with his peers. And all of that, it's interesting because I think we don't have just a one-sided problem here. We have several angles from which you can look at this and note that there is a problem. It's not just training and figuring out what it is, but it's how to deal with it.

And do you feel that, in his case, that a teacher, who is using a classic method for children without dyslexia, could also deal with helping him learn at the same time, just with a few other ways of doing it, or do you think that there is some necessity for individualized learning apart from the mainstream classroom?

ANGELA HICKMANN: Are you asking if I think his classroom teacher needs to change some of his program for him in the classroom in addition to special education?

REP. LAVIELLE: I didn't express myself very well. Do you think that under ideal circumstances or circumstances you could imagine, that the classroom teacher could deal with this fully, or that he would also need some specialized instruction from a specialist?

ANGELA HICKMANN: He definitely needs specialized instruction in the right program. The classroom teacher could offer him accommodations, which should be implemented through this IEP, such as allowing him to be able to continue to maintain and build his superior level of vocabulary comprehension by allowing him to follow along in a book that is at his comprehension level, which has been indexed at the sixth grade level.

But the teacher, I think simply because of a lack of knowledge and lack of mandates, there's nothing that requires her to have to allow him

to use supports that would continue his learning in way that would target his needs.

So what the classroom teacher could do is during the independent reading time, students like my son could follow along in their books with an audio book, so that they maintain that level; and then go to their specialized reading class for the multisensory instruction to isolate the (inaudible), to pull them apart, to put them together. So that does require an individualized instruction at the third grade. That type of instruction does happen in kindergarten. Certainly more needs to be done in that regard, but by third grade and now looking into fourth grade, he would need both. But I'm at a crossroads now, and I don't have assurances that he would get the appropriate program that he needs.

REP. LAVIELLE: And do you feel that the -- yeah -- he's not being able to, for example, use an audio book in the classroom --

ANGELA HICKMANN: Uh-huh.

REP. LAVIELLE: -- is that being, do you think, discouraged by the school system, or do you feel like it's just a teacher who isn't sufficiently trained to know that that could help?

ANGELA HICKMANN: Well, I think there's a broader picture that when I began teaching 20 years ago, whole language was the methodology that was popular at the time, and the theory around whole language was if the students just read more, immerse them in books, then they will somehow just figure it out.

Well, the National Reading Panel then was commissioned with doing the research and

publishing the report that sought to eradicate whole language. So teachers like myself have moved on to leadership positions, and they still hold on to those whole language beliefs, even though science has disproven that that type of instruction, for most of the kids -- some kids, like myself, I was able to see the patterns in the words -- but the majority of the kids do not; and they do need the explicit systematic instruction.

So I think there may be a variety of variables that are going on, but I do believe in my experience, in my heart that if the teachers are required to implement the methodology, then they will. They absolutely will. They want to help the kids.

You know, we connect at the PPT meetings, but it's also discouraged that, no, he can't listen to the audio books because his eyes aren't on the print. And, therefore, if his eyes aren't on the print, he's not learning to read, which is whole language; and it's been disproven.

REP. LAVIELLE: Well, thank you very much for sharing all that with us and for taking time out of your day to be here.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Thank you very much for your testimony.

ANGELA HICKMANN: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Since calling Ms. Hickmann to the (inaudible), I've noticed that there are some other parents of young children who are waiting, and we're getting towards the witching hour for children of certain age.

So I'll invite you since you're nearest to the microphone to come first, and other parents with small children who are hoping to leave, just sort of move towards the front; and we'll allow you to testify and have your children testify with you if that's part of your plan and leave this building, which I'm sure is your aspiration.

If you want to just give your name and which number you were on the list.

DAWN MCNARY: I believe I was 65. It's Dawn McNary. Is that right?

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Please go ahead.

DAWN MCNARY: Okay. Well, thank you. I saw the trend, so I moved to the front row.

HB 5562

But you heard from Jesse earlier. You have my testimony. I'm going to kind of jump through it a little bit because a lot of it has been said.

I'm the parent of a fourth grader in East Haddam, and I'm a returning resident to the state of Connecticut. I moved away about 20 years ago. I've been back once before.

I moved to Texas where I spent a good part of the last 20 years. But I started -- my older child was in Brookfield School. Then he went on to schools back in Texas. This one started in Texas, and now he's coming back here.

And being in the town that I was, about 20 miles east of Dallas is a town called Forney. That district was so far advanced in dyslexia and dysgraphia identification with the interventions they had, it's hard to accept anything less, and coming back to Connecticut

has been really difficult.

The definition of dyslexia and the process for identification in Texas dates back to the mid 1990's. The education of the educators has been going on for more than a decade now, and the results are truly measureable. You can find the definition. I put it in there, but it's under Texas Education Code 38.003, their definition. And they train all their general ed. teachers as well as the dyslexia specialist in the school to identify it.

These general ed. teacher start in kindergarten and first grade to bring this to the parents' attention, and I will tell you -- it breaks my heart to say it, but I said no. My child can't be dyslexic.

I was on the other side of the equation at first. I didn't get it. I thought dyslexia was all the backward letters. He's too smart. He's too smart. That can't be. I mean, he reads like crazy. He reads with me.

Then he started coming home -- they do something there called accelerated reader. I'm not a fan of it, but they did accelerated reader. And he'd come home. He'd read the books and take the tests. After they took them, and he'd say, "I got 100. I got 100." I'm like, "How are you getting 100? I know you can't read them." "Well, I just kind of figure it out. I know kind of what it says. I know kind of." So he could skim through.

Then third grade hit, not so much fun anymore. Third grade was kind of the wall, and you'll hear about the wall a lot the more you talk about dyslexia.

And the teacher came to me again and asked me

, if she could check with him and go through the testing, and I finally, after much talking with my husband, said okay. Well, they sat down with him. They did a long series of tests, parent questionnaire, everything, and it was determined that he did have dyslexia; and there were different accommodations that we needed to do. Move to Connecticut, they throw it out the window.

I have been in a PPT every month since August of enrollment. I have sat in that office and been told no. We're getting him through a loophole right now. He also goes to speech therapy, and they had him in resource and reading intervention. None of that applied to dyslexia.

So through the speech program in East Haddam, she is going the LITS program. It's not ideal, but it is something that is helping. And just supporting this would make a difference because the number one thing that I had from my administer in East Haddam was, oh, no. Dyslexia, we don't have to deal with that. He's not dyslexic. We don't worry about that. It's under SD. That's good enough. And the truth is it's not good enough because he's not getting the MTA or the multisensory training he needs.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Understood. Thank you very much.

DAWN MCNARY: Uh-huh.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Like your son, you paint a very clear picture. It's very helpful.

Are there questions from members of the committee? Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA: Thank you. You know, I wanted to

say to the other mother too how brave all you mothers and dads are today to come here today. It's quite impressive, as it should be.

But one of the things you talked about was your son in Connecticut has been offered a reading program and a resource program, but you're saying those programs that your school is providing don't deal with dyslexia? No one is trained in them or --

DAWN MCNARY: They're not trained in dyslexia, decoding and encoding at all. They have zero training in it, and the program that he was doing in Texas, number one, wasn't pulling him out of the class the same way it is here, and it was very teaching-oriented. It was three to five children in a class. It was the Margaret Taylor Smith Program, a multisensory teaching approach. They do everything in cursive. They break down all the words. It's very specific.

Here it was reading intervention, old school, go in a room with 10 kids and go to the resource room. So he's be going to speech two days a week, reading intervention two days a week, resource two days a week. Well, you know, that's six days now.

REP. KOKORUDA: Yeah.

DAWN MCNARY: He was missing large chunks of time. As it is now, we've got it down to only missing music class, all his home base periods, and we've limited it to what is really making a difference. We've had to tweak it.

But the MTA program addresses dyslexia in a way that I cannot begin to explain. He probably could better than me, but it's all kit based. And they work through it. And it's very much phonetic-based, phonic, understanding how the

letters go together, more language knowledge than you or I need to know, but they do; and it makes sense.

I've watched him go from below a second grade level up to over a fifth grade reading level. So he was reading above level in seven months of instruction. Then we moved. I've watched that seven months completely disappear.

And now because he's in fourth grade, that means it affects math, science, and with common core -- the comments that I've gotten from one teacher was, "I'm sorry. Common core doesn't allow me to teach to (inaudible) students. And I can't -- even though he has an IEP, I can't teach the material differently to your child."

Okay. So now what do I do? She sent me home with photocopies of his -- of the common core curriculum that she had, and she said, "You teach him at home." Okay.

REP. KOKORUDA: Thank you very much. Thank you for that.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Are there any other questions from members of the committee? If not, thank you for your time and testimony.

DAWN MCNARY: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: If the next parent with a small child would come forward and let us -- let us know you're name, where you were on the list.

AMANDA DAWLEY: Hello. My number was number 64, Amanda Dawley.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Please proceed.

HB5562 AMANDA DAWLEY: Okay. Thank you for the

opportunity, Senator, Representative
Fleischmann, Co-Chairs.

A lot of it has been repeated, as the other testimonies make progress through the day.

My personal experience with our town school system in Montville has been a large and grueling one. I have learned if a parent does not persistently push and know what to ask for, a dyslexic child will not be recognized.

It has been a year since I demanded the initial testing, more testing last November, and finally an independent evaluation diagnosing my son with the broad term of reading disorder, and let's allow these kids the gratification of what their disorder is, dyslexia.

A year and a half it has been, five PPTs, hours of testing, a diagnosis, and next comes working with the school to administer a program that will help my son. All that time has passed to get him to this point and still not receiving instruction which will help him yet.

When I sit in on my son's decoding reading group, knowing what I know now, I can't help but feel remorse for those other kids that may be dyslexic and never be recognized.

It must be as equally frustrating for our teachers in this state to teach the children who display characteristics of dyslexia, to have their hands tied and not have a proven reading instruction program or training.

I do not know the dollar amount it costs the state to give a child an education for 13 years, but we all know in this room that reading is the ground level base of an education. Let's give our children an early

identification and proven reading instruction that will allow them to succeed. Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for your testimony and your candor about the experiences you've had to deal with.

Are there questions? Senator Stillman.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you.

Thank you for being here, and thank you to your son for -- he looks the way I look and I feel. I'm glad we'll be able to release you both.

I'm interested. I represent Montville, and I have received some real concerns from other parents in Montville, and not just on this issue, on the other issue that's in Section 2 of the bill about the district recognizing that there are issues out there; and that parents have rights, quite frankly. And that's another issue, but it is a special education issue as well.

And I am a little concerned to read that all these PPTs and everything else, diagnoses are not coming as fast as they should from the school system. We know that they are from the parents because you're all out there advocating for your children.

You mentioned in your testimony that you have two older children.

AMANDA DAWLEY: Uh-huh.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Did they also go to the same school system?

AMANDA DAWLEY: Yes, they did.

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SENATOR STILLMAN: They did.

AMANDA DAWLEY: Okay.

SENATOR STILLMAN: But they're not dyslexic, so --
at least I believe that's what you stated.

AMANDA DAWLEY: No disabilities. They fly straight
like a bird, where Nicholas is more like a
butterfly.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Okay. What I find interesting is
that many of the parents we've heard from today
have stated that what a high IQ so many of the
children have, and so it's not a matter of the
fact that they can't learn. We have to teach
them in a different way, and so they can learn.
Of course, we all know how important self-
esteem is for our children as they go through
life.

Again, he's another one hitting the wall at a
certain grade level, etc.

It's a little unclear to me as to what's going
on with your son now. Do you feel as though
they're finally paying attention or not?

AMANDA DAWLEY: He was just diagnosed about a month
ago. The school paid for an independent eval
portion for the dyslexia. The doctor met with
him for about 45 minutes, also using what --
the testing that the school had administered
previously.

Now comes -- we haven't gotten to that point to
discuss -- to see, hopefully, if they're going
to give him the proper instruction. As you see
and hear, he has been -- to my knowledge, I did
not know this before. He has been in a tier-
three reading program, instruction program,
small group, for three years. Now I learn now

that is not how it should be.

But moving forward, we have not made it to that point, but fingers crossed, I'm hoping that we don't have to endure what some of these families endure. We can move forward.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you very much and all the best.

Mr. Chairman.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you very much.

Any other questions? If not, thank you very much for your time, and patience, and testimony advocacy.

AMANDA DAWLEY: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Are there any other parents of young children who are dealing with kicking and scratching that we're not seeing, who might be trying to escape?

If not, we will return to the order of the day. I believe Joe Reardon, Union Superintendent of Schools, is next on the list if he's still here. Joe has given up. It would next be Vanessa Vowe of Literacy Volunteers to be followed by Kelly Howard, if she's still here.

If you could press the button in front of you. Thanks.

VANESSA VOWE: I am the program director for Literacy Volunteers of Greater Waterbury, and I also have been an adult literacy tutor for 20 years. And I strongly urge your support of Bill No. 5562, Section 1, but with the addition of universal definition of dyslexia and

effective professional development for educators.

I work on a daily basis with adults who struggle to read their own mail, fill out medical forms, complete job applications, read a book to their children, decode signs they encounter everywhere. And I just name a few of the very basic demands in life that require the ability to read and write. Can you imagine what your life would be like if you struggled with these every day?

Unfortunately, too many adult learners in our program, who exhibit signs of dyslexia, were never screened for dyslexia when they were in school. Without early identification and proper interventions, we hear painful stories of adults who have endured the label of stupid, though they are intelligent, creative individuals; who keep their literacy homework locked in briefcases so that their sons and daughters will not discover that their mothers and fathers cannot read; who turn down job promotions because they fear that their employers will learn that they cannot read reports; who have spent a major portion of their lives in prison, without a sense of self-worth and with limited opportunities to transition to a better way of life; who cry because no one understands how much they have suffered.

It is so important to point out that remediation of reading as an adult is extremely difficult. Literacy takes many hours of instruction and practice, and adults do not often have the luxury of time. Finding and keeping a job, child care, family pressures, and many, many other obstacles interfere with learning.

Some adults may never even seek help with reading after so many failures in school. It is too humiliating for them, and that is why we must ensure that all children learn to read while they are in school.

So please support this bill with the noted additions. Effective help for children with dyslexia is long overdue. Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for your testimony, and for all the work that you do to try to address the challenges that you just raised.

VANESSA VOWE: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Are there questions from members of the committee? If not, thank you very much.

VANESSA VOWE: Okay. Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Is Abbie Benitez here? Abbie, I understand that you're going to come up with some of your colleagues from New Haven Public Schools, which is fine, especially if you all are on the same page and can coordinate with each other?

ABBIE BENITEZ: Yes. We are going to try to keep these under three minutes.

HBSS62
Good afternoon, Representative Fleischmann. Thank you for the committee to give us the opportunity to talk.

My name is Abbie Benitez. I am a principal in New Haven Public Schools of a dual language school. You have my submitted testimony, my recent testimony.

But I want to point out a few points, very important. One of them is that it's important

that we understand that bilingual programs are seen as a positive addition for schools in Connecticut, and that we can use the strong native knowledge that they bring from home to really fulfill what those kids need.

And also that our students, who only speak English, can benefit from meeting their peers who speak Spanish, and both of them with both English-speaking teachers and native-speaker teachers can make a school a stronger experience for students who have English language learning barriers.

I also want to ask that everybody understands that if we are going to teach children to think, we must do it in a language that they understand, and then, of course, never without teaching them English because we all know we do have to speak English in this country and specifically in this state.

And the most important thing in terms of teacher preparation, we do have to create more teacher preparation opportunities, but we also have to open the reciprocity with states and territories of the United States that have speakers of those other languages, where the measurements for certification are with a standard. And if they are certified teachers, they should have the reciprocity given here in Connecticut without limitations.

And last, I want to say that the priorities for the parents of English language learners is that their children learn content, feel accomplished, and, of course, also learn English. Please don't lose that thought.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: If some of you want to add some other brief remarks to complement those, that's welcome.

DR. MADELINE NEGRON: Thank you for the opportunity. I am Dr. Madeline Negron, principal of Hill Regional Career High School in New Haven.

I just wanted to stress that limiting bilingual education to 30 months goes against a wealth of research on second language acquisition, such as that of Jim (inaudible) and Virginia Collier, which indicate that an average student will require at least five years to attain grade level competency on academic aspects of English proficiency.

The statute pushes (inaudible), whether ready or not to exit the bilingual program, only mandating that districts provide language transitional services to the students. This results in ELLs having to continue acquiring proficiency in English, where learning core academic content in (inaudible) classrooms and reaching mastery (inaudible).

Also, the statute prohibits high school students with fewer than 30 months to go until graduation from receiving a program of bilingual education, placing them in mainstream classrooms. In other words, should a student register in the 10th grade, he or she will be ineligible to access the services of bilingual education. Districts are only responsible for providing intensive services to enable students to speak, write, and comprehend English.

Unfortunately, this is not enough to support students, who in many cases were performing at grade level or above in the academic institutions while in their countries. But now have the challenge of having to acquire English proficiency while also mastering the demands of the content knowledge in various difficulties.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. We do have written testimony that folks submitted, so if you want to sort of summarize the essence of what you'd like to offer the committee, the key points that -- .

DR. EVELYN ROBLES: My name is Evelyn Robles, and I am also a principal at Worthington Hooker School in New Haven.

And I just want to add that it is very important for teachers and administrators to receive professional development on addressing the linguistic and academic needs of our English language learners.

We really need additional funding to provide teachers and administrators great effective preparation programs to include at least nine credits on addressing curriculum implementation, strategies, and effective models that address the needs of English language learners.

PEDRO MENDIA-LANDA: Finally, we ask that the committee does support incentive programs, complex ability in teacher certification requirements, as Dr. Benitez did say, that will increase the number of bilingual teachers, who are necessary now and will even be more necessary when the number of months is increased.

My name is Pedro Mendia-Landa, and I'm the bilingual supervisor for the New Haven Public Schools. You do have my written statement.

We want to thank you for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to working with you and making sure our English language learners succeed in our schools, as well as college, career, and life, and we begin looking at them

as assets and not detriments to our communities.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. I have one very simple question, and I think it's most appropriate for me to direct it at you, Mr. Mendia-Landa.

You heard the State Department of Education indicate that they have concerns about the number of educators, and you yourself alluded to the shortage. If we were to go ahead and move in this direction, how would a district like New Haven find the teachers you need to fill all the bilingual slots that you would need to fill?

PEDRO MENDIA-LANDA: So currently, as you know, I mean, we are working with the State Department of Education through the (inaudible) program trying to certify bilingual teachers, you know, as soon as we can. I mean, that is an area where we have -- you know, where we are gathering teachers, as you say.

Most importantly, I think that as Dr. Benitez alluded, I think that we need flexibility in terms of a certification. Flexibility to be able to, you know, hire teachers who, you know, are dominant in the Spanish language. They would be perfect candidates to work in bilingual programs, and even provide them incentives, specifically if they were to work in dual language programs.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: I think that's very helpful. Thank you.

Any other questions from members of the committee? If not, thank you very much for your time, and testimony, and for all the work that you do for the children of New Haven.

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PEDRO MENDIA-LANDA: Thank you for the time.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Is Thomas Kunas still here? How about Edward Bray? Tracy Heim? Edie Joseph? Mary Roberts? Tom Drewry? I'm sorry. Did I skip --

KELLY HOWARD: Kelly Howard.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: You know, my apologies, Kelly. I think you somehow got checked of when we had parents coming up, but please -- it was an accident on my part. So you're up followed by Tom Drewry.

Thank you for keeping us honest. It was an honest mistake, and it's been a long day.

KELLY HOWARD: Okay.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: I appreciate your coming forth.

KELLY HOWARD: Good evening, Representative Fleischmann and the Education Committee.

I know it's been a long day, so I'll be brief. You missed earlier. My daughters weren't able to address the committee. They had to leave.

My name is Kelly Howard. I'm from New Hartford, Connecticut. And I support HB Bill 5562.

My daughter Zoey was recently diagnosed with dyslexia. She's in first grade at Bakerville Consolidated School in New Hartford, Connecticut.

My husband and I paid for an independent evaluation for Zoey, which recently she was diagnosed with dyslexia and expressive language

disorder.

I had asked the school if she could be tested for dyslexia, and they told me that they were not aware of any testing that could be done before second grade, though we knew that there was something definitely wrong. So we paid and had our own independent evaluation.

We have been paying since kindergarten for independent tutors, and we recently hired a tutor who specializes in Orton-Gillingham and Lindamood-Bell. She's certified, and we're paying out of pocket.

Our doctor -- we had a consultation with the school, and the doctor provided recommendations for interventions for Zoey. And we met with the school, and we're currently working through trying to get the right interventions. And they're trying to negotiate what interventions they're going to give us. So we're at that stage now.

So I'm just asking that you support Section 1 of this bill and also take into consideration the additional recommendations that have been made here this evening to engage the language within the bill.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for that very clear, concise, thoughtful testimony.

Are there questions from members of the committee? Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA: I'm afraid I know the answer already, but I just wanted to be clear. These private interventions you're doing, is any of it covered by insurance or anything?

KELLY HOWARD: No. No. And I think that's what

bothers me most. We can -- I mean, we can afford to do this. It's not like we have a lot of extra money to do this, but I worry about people that do not have the funds to get the testing or to get the tutoring because it's very expensive. So, you know, we give up a lot so that our daughter can have this extra tutoring.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Any other questions?
Representative Miller.

REP. MILLER: Just to piggyback on my colleague's question. If you wouldn't mind, would you -- could you tell us approximately how much you've spent so far in the tutoring, and the hiring of the independent evaluator?

KELLY HOWARD: The independent evaluation was \$2,500. It's not covered by insurance, and we just had that done. I scheduled my appointment in July of 2013 to get in for January 2014.

The tutoring is \$100 an hour, and my daughter has had tutoring since kindergarten. We didn't have the right type of tutoring in kindergarten because I didn't actually know it was dyslexia at first. So now that I know, we hired the right type of tutor for her.

So we're paying -- I did ask at our PPT meeting if they could pay for the tutor over the summer because we've been paying, and they said no. The school won't pay for that.

REP. KOKORUDA: Thank you for your testimony, and thank you for sharing your situation with us because I think it's very important that the residents of the state of Connecticut realize what parents who have children who are dyslexic are going through. So I appreciate you staying as late as you did to make sure that your voice

is heard regarding this.

KELLY HOWARD: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Any other questions? If not, thank you, again, and you can thank your daughters as well.

KELLY HOWARD: Okay.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Now it's Tom Drewry's turn.

TOM DREWRY: Good evening, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Tom Drewry, and I am Vice President of the Windham Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 1577. WFT represents over 350 teachers throughout the Windham School District. It is on their behalf that I testify before you today on HB 5566, and why we need to make changes to the special master statute.

PA 1161 is a piece of legislation fraught with a deep ambiguity reflected in the title of the position it created. The crafters of this language obviously hope to evoke us on some virtuosity or expertise. Connotations of the word master on through its ancient affinity with words like maestro and the Latin word for teacher, magister.

In PA 1161, this sense of the word is taken up in the mandate that the special master share his expertise in making collaborative decisions with local experts, the superintendent and the Board of Education in particular.

But master is a much more disquieting sense, one indicating extensive arbitrary and often cruelly imposed authority. This sense is reflected in terms such as task master and plantation master and stand in opposition to a

PA 1161 proposed by HB 5566 would do little more than change the title of special master to district turnaround specialist. Unless more substantial alterations, such as those attached to my testimony, are made to ensure that the authority invested in the position is precisely defined and subject to objective external review, then the title special master would remain as the more appropriate one.

Thank you for this opportunity. I would be happy to answer any questions.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for that testimony and the good summary, which I think captured what you were driving towards. I appreciate that.

Are there questions or comments from members of the committee? If not, thank you for your time, your testimony, your advocacy, your patience.

TOM DREWRY: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Is Jessica Theisen still with us?

JESSICA THEISEN: Yes.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Your time is now.

JESSICA THEISEN: Hi. Thank you for taking the time to hear me.

I am here today to testify in support of raised House Bill 5562. My name is Jessica Theisen, and I live in Milford, Connecticut. I am the parent of an eight-year-old daughter, Isabelle, who is severely dyslexic.

We knew something was not quite right early on and placed her in the town preschool, assuming she would get early intervention. It has been

nothing but an uphill battle since.

Our family has been through hell and back trying to get help for our daughter. Even though she cannot read, write, or do math, we were consistently told she was age-appropriate, and was actually told by the head of special education that writing is not taught in the public schools.

If you are sick, you go to a doctor. If you need your taxes done, you go to an accountant. If you suspect a learning disability, you go to the professionals in the school system. We have only been given denials and delays, and now have a third grader who reads on a pre-kindergarten level, but that is age appropriate.

This state has an SRBI program which is supposed to be utilized for intervention, and if no progress made, changes made every six to eight weeks.

Our daughter was placed in tier-3 intervention and left there with no improvement for over 20 weeks. The reading specialist had been in education for over 30 years, and due to a lack of awareness and training, seemed to think it was attention issue.

We had to retain an attorney going into second grade because our child was so far behind her peers. When we got the attorney, her services tripled.

We sought outside evaluations, which revealed numerous learning disabilities and that our child is severely dyslexic. Because the process took so long and no real action was taken by the school district, our once happy and sweet child has become very angry. She

hates school and anything to do with it. She has psychosomatic symptoms to try and get out of class and has become a frequent flyer at the nurse's office.

As Legislators, you may assume the schools are doing what they are supposed to be doing, and they are aware of and educated on dyslexia; and the red flags that indicate there is an issue and that they're ensuring our children are taken care of, the whole child. I'm here to tell you that they are not.

The lack of awareness into professional development, because of this, she has been made to feel stupid, dumb, and lazy.

Isabelle had every red flag there is to have for dyslexia and learning disability, yet we were continually told she was age appropriate.

Now I can see how a child can get to ninth grade and be illiterate. Yet as a working class family, we have had to sacrifice and trade off needs of our other child to afford services for her and to pay for an attorney to get the school to do what they should have already been doing.

As a side note, we're probably up to \$40,000 to \$50,000.

Isabelle is frustrated because she looks like any other eight-year-old but academically is not where her peers are.

I am not naive in understanding there is an expense involved, but if you do to frontload the problem, you're creating a much more expensive burden on society in the long run. Thirty percent of dyslexics are great entrepreneurs, and 48 percent of them make up

our inmate population.

This legislation will not help our child, but it can help another. While going through this process, we cannot hope by wonder what happens to the kids whose parents are uneducated, believe the school system, cannot take time from work to go to the meetings held at the times convenient for the school, or have the funds to hire an attorney or advocate to battle the system with a bottomless wallet.

I strongly encourage you to support this legislation and include a definition of early screening for and professional development and awareness about this disability. It would have made a word of difference for our child.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for your testimony. I'm very sorry for the challenges that you, and your family, and your child have had to deal with. And I would ask you to consider, if there are questions, when they're done, sharing with the folks in the corner over there just what school system you've been dealing with and maybe some contact information.

JESSICA THEISEN: Okay.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: So that we can potentially try and be helpful to you as you deal with what you're doing.

Are there questions from members of the committee? Thank you very much.

JESSICA THEISEN: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Is Bob Rath still here from CCA? How about Allison Quirion? Welcome.

ALLISON QUIRION: Thank you.

I, too, am a parent of a dyslexic child, Jack, who testified earlier today. I'm also the founder of a parent grassroots movement, Decoding Dyslexia Connecticut, trying to provide support to parents for public policy change, to empower them, to advocate for their children.

I believe Connecticut needs to join the other 26 states that have pending or current legislation that support dyslexic students and their teachers. I believe we have a knowledge gap here in Connecticut versus an action gap, as you cannot take action if you do not know how or do not have the information.

From my personal experience and the experience of many of our members, there is a lack of dyslexia awareness in our public schools, as you have heard here today.

My story, Jack, entered kindergarten eager to learn. These feelings changed as he had difficulty learning his letters and letter sounds. As kindergarten ended, I was told that Jack was consistently inconsistent, but they weren't sure why.

First grade came with more stress, anxiety, reading groups, reading aloud. Tears were a part of our nightly routine. Still receiving the same message, Jack was consistently inconsistent.

Second grade was his breaking point. His compensatory skills were running out. He was anxious, nervous, and didn't want to go to school. At that point his second grade teacher confirmed my concerns and my feelings, that something more was going on but didn't know what.

Due to the lack of resources, knowledge, and early identification, Jack entered third grade reading below a first grade level.

We look at these children. They're suffering from anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and behavior issues.

I believe, at a very minimum, this committee should look to a universal definition with clear inclusionary and exclusionary characteristics of dyslexia. This will provide an understanding and will facilitate communication and lead to more rapid provision of interventions.

We need our teachers to be provided with professional development with proven and effective measures so they can successfully identify and support our dyslexic students.

I heard Governor Malloy speak at a press conference a few weeks ago. He indicated that he wants our teachers to be successful and that Connecticut voices are heard. I ask the Education Committee if you will support those statements. Will you provide our teachers the resources and the knowledge about dyslexia so they can be successful? Will our voices be heard? Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Like your son, you are a compelling witness.

Are there questions from members of the committee? Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, Allison, thank you for your testimony. The Decoding Dyslexia Connecticut, is that a

grassroots group?

ALLISON QUIRION: Yes.

REP. ACKERT: And when did you start collaborating, put it together?

ALLISON QUIRION: So when I was trying to find resources and to connect with parents, I felt very isolated. So I reached out to a group in New Jersey, which is Decoding Dyslexia New Jersey. They were advocating for public policy changes in New Jersey, and they were asking other parents in other states to start chapters.

In February of 2013, I started Decoding Dyslexia Connecticut. I was the sixth chapter to sign on. We just had a national conference a few weeks ago, and we are 46 states strong.

REP. ACKERT: Well, thank you. You represent them well. Thanks for your testimony.

ALLISON QUIRION: Thank you.

REP. ACKERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Are there other questions? Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA: Just briefly, and I know you've been at it all day with us, and thank you for staying.

You know, a couple years ago most of us were very happy to work in a bipartisan manner on an education reform bill, and one of the things that drove us was the problem with people in our community that faced problems with their third grade reading scores.

And, boy, did you hit home today. To think that we know this is an issue in some of our poorest neighborhoods, and we want to do something about it. And to think that this is an issue, the breath of our communities totally, and it's about time we did something about it. So thank you for bringing that to our attention.

Thank you to everybody.

ALLISON QUIRION: Yeah. So I'd just like to say that the parents and that the students who are here today, most of us have never met each other before. Coming today together to support this. Very touching to be with people who actually know what we're going through.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. And while this was not the intention of the Education Committee, hopefully this turned out to be a good recruitment opportunity for your organization, and you've got some more people who have signed up and who will be able to work with you on these issues.

ALLISON QUIRION: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Is Marilyn Pete still here? How about Dr. Shelley Pelletier? Marc Hoffman I see in the corner.

MARC HOFFMAN: Thank you, Representative Fleischmann and members of the committee.

If any of the members of the committee are ADHD, I sympathize with you. It has been a long day, and my medication has worn off. So bear with me.

I'm Marc Hoffman. I own Marc Hoffman Educational Consulting. I'm a graduate of

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Williams College. I have a master's degree in child psychology from Yeshiva University.

I'm the board share of a national nonprofit that provides mentoring for children with dyslexia. It takes college students who are dyslexic, and they mentor children in the community who are dyslexic. There's a chapter at Wesley.

I'm a proud dyslexic.

I want to tell you about a boy, Troy, who I met three weeks ago, and Troy is not from Westport, Connecticut. He's from a much different socioeconomic environment.

Troy and his mother come up to me. The mother had to introduce Troy. He was void of self-esteem. He was timid, and I asked Troy, "How's school?" He told me he hates it. He feels stupid.

He told me that informally the reading groups have names. So there's the swans, the eagles, and his group is referred to as the pigeons. Troy is smart. His mother sent me his testing. He has 130 verbal IQ, but he can't read.

The statistic was referenced; 48 percent of jail populations are dyslexic. The citation is Moody 2000. However, that was a random sampling. They estimate that 80 percent of jail populations are illiterate.

Many of these men who are incarcerated are great entrepreneurs. They're just starting the wrong kind of business. If you start a \$10 million drug ring, you're a pretty sophisticated entrepreneur.

Twenty percent of the population is dyslexic.

If 48 percent of jail population is dyslexic, we're dealing with a civil rights issue.

There's two reasons that this legislation -- and I thank you for considering referencing dyslexia on an IEP, but it's not enough. There's a requirement for a universal definition. Furthermore, teachers need to have professional development.

The original proposed bill, 120, did reference professional development. I hire and meet many teachers; 95 percent -- that's an arbitrary number -- but most want every child to access an appropriate education, but they need to understand the dyslexic profile.

From a moralistic perspective, we do this work because every child should have an appropriate education.

And I'll wrap up with this, from a practical perspective, we need these minds. We are losing the next Steve Jobs, the next Steven Spielberg, the next Will Smith, all dyslexics. We need these thinkers, but they have to get through school.

Thank you and I'll take any questions.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. And like our Governor, you're someone for whom it would be hard to believe you were dyslexic, if you didn't announce it as part of your statement, since you're obviously so able to express yourself well.

You also left off your list of famous dyslexics, Tom Cruise.

MARC HOFFMAN: Scientology cured his dyslexia.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: I will not comment on that. Are there -- Representative Miller.

REP. MILLER: Good afternoon, Marc. Thank you for coming up and waiting to testify. We appreciate it.

Marc, I see that you have a second business, the education consulting --

MARC HOFFMAN: Sure.

REP. MILLER: -- business and besides that the mentoring program. Do you provide any other services to children with dyslexia?

MARC HOFFMAN: So my Hoffman Education provides one-on-one remediation. So we help children with learning how to read with research-based programs such as Orton-Gillingham.

So, yes, to answer your question, we work one-on-one with children who are dyslexic..

REP. MILLER: And I don't know if you'll be able to answer this. Do you service families that are low income?

MARC HOFFMAN: Pro bono. No. Primarily my clientele is Caucasian, middle class to extremely wealthy.

So the treatment component, you need to luck out is the way I see it.

If your building has someone who has the skill set to help the child, you potentially can get the remediation in that particular school building, and what I find is that a particular principal or administrator had direct experience with dyslexia, so they made it part of their agenda. It is not consistent across

the board.

REP. MILLER: Do you -- assuming that with these low income students, students who are low income --

MARC HOFFMAN: Uh-huh.

REP. MILLER: -- who may have dyslexia, and if their parents cannot afford a private evaluation or independent evaluation, what do you think will happen to these students, if they're not identified?

MARC HOFFMAN: They'll become like that 40-year-old you mentioned. They become completely marginalized.

In terms of dyslexia being cross-cultural, it exists in every population. It's a complete -- when we're talking about underserved communities, it's an absolute epidemic. It's not even being addressed. It's not part of the dialogue.

So in communities that do not have resources and the child can't read, we can answer that question. Their outcomes are extremely poor.

REP. MILLER: So you made reference to 48 percent of our prison population is dyslexia, and someone else made reference to that statistic as well. So you think that -- I assume the statistics are saying or implying that students who can't read will eventually dropout. They have to earn their living somehow, and eventually end up in prison. Would you agree with that assumption?

MARC HOFFMAN: So I would agree it's somewhat adaptive. So it's survival. You know, it's interesting. The emotional stability of dyslexics was referenced, and actually Orton-

Gillingham, the doctor, looked at children who are dyslexic. In preschool they were not depressed. When they were expected to read is when the onset of depression took place.

So they were happy children showing no pathology. Depression came about, and this affects the population you're referencing. Depression came about when they were expected to read.

REP. MILLER: Okay. Well, thank you very much --

MARC HOFFMAN: Thank you.

REP. MILLER: -- again, for your testimony and answering my questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Are there other questions for Mr. Hoffman? Mr. Molgano.

REP. MOLGANO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Hello, Marc.

MARC HOFFMAN: Nice to see you.

REP. MOLGANO: Thank you for being here.

To piggyback on what Representative Miller just said then, what is the earliest age that is the most appropriate to test, and when does this actually become evident? I mean, I wouldn't want to wait to the child's asked to read. I mean, is there an age appropriate level when this should be done.

MARC HOFFMAN: So there's inexpensive screening mechanisms that do not require the child to be tested by a psychologist. So there are some

schools that have batteries that can screen decoding issues. Mr. Margie (Inaudible) submitted that in her testimony. However, those screening tools are not consistent in every Connecticut elementary public school.

So to answer your question clinically, we would look at it being a real issue around first grade.

Just to add one point to my response, there is medical science now that can screen -- it's in the pipeline -- can screen the brain of a three-year-old who's dyslexic. So if your parent is dyslexic, there's a 60 percent chance that that child will be dyslexic. If I may -- and my mother hopes I get married pretty soon. If I marry a woman who's dyslexic, there's a 90 percent chance that I have a child who's dyslexic. But there is excellent neuroscience that can actually screen the brain of a three-year-old to see if that child is dyslexic. The beauty of that is, then you really hit the issue early.

Preventative measures that come about as early as possible are -- it's imperative that it takes place. So where neuroscience is going with dyslexia is very, very exciting. I mean, I don't think they're going to put MRIs in every elementary school, but there's just so much neuroscience.

I need to be on the record. You need to have at least average intelligence to be dyslexic. The dyslexics I meet, most of them -- I read a neuropsych once a week -- many of them are brilliant. Their IQs verbally are off the charts.

So it's important. I wish more of the children were here. I love demystifying dyslexia for a

young child, though I hope I answered your question in kind of a roundabout way.

REP. MOLGANO: You did. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Are there other questions for Mr. Hoffman? Thank you very much for your time --

MARC HOFFMAN: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: -- and advocacy, and all the work that you do for the dyslexic community.

MARC HOFFMAN: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Is Eydis Lima still here? My apologies for what I might have done to your name.

EYDIS LIMA: So good afternoon. Good evening actually.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Good evening.

EYDIS LIMA: Sorry. It's Eydis Lima. I specifically tell everybody Eydis, but that's a disgrace to my culture.

So I'm a community member at Windham, and I'm here today to testify on behalf of a parent that was not able to make it. Her letter was given to you, and it's written in Spanish. I am translating it for you.

She is supporting Bill 476 on behalf of bilingual education.

"Hola. My name is Alice Ducos. I am the mother of (inaudible) Cruz, who is now in second grade. The purpose of this letter is to

the kids back on track.

I have provided two detailed examples of the alternative schools in my testimony in which legal services, attorneys have intervened, but you should know that many school systems who expel a child for as long as a year, provide two hours of tutoring a day for an expelled student without any kind of intervention that addresses the behavior that got the child expelled.

Now, if you have a child who violated school rules so seriously that they had to be taken out of the school, it doesn't seem like a wise decision to leave this child basically unsupervised for a large part of the day. Tutoring can happen at a library, or at home, or at the school itself, but the programs that school districts offer are not always adequate.

So I would urge you to pass this bill.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for your testimony and your advocacy on behalf of those children.

Are there questions from members of the committee? No. Thank you, again.

CHERYL KOHLER: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: I'm guess that Les Fredette left with Susan Fredette.

LES FREDETTE: No.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: No? I was -- please come to the microphone. Now I understand why you're so aware of Susan's whereabouts.

LES FREDETTE: Thank you so much for this opportunity.

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Distinguished Senators and Representatives of the Education Committee, I want to thank you for providing Connecticut residents and myself the opportunity to speak to you about the act concerning special education, 5562, you are now considering.

My name is Les Fredette, and for the past decade my wife, Susan, and I have been running a center for literacy difficulties, for dyslexia and ADHD in (inaudible).

I'm here today to support the bill before you, Section 1, believing that in the long run it will bring dyslexia the much needed recognition that it deserves, being the number one cause of chronic reading difficulties, affecting about 10 to 15 percent of people around the world.

As a man of science, however, I have been disturbed, confused, and even appalled at the numerous times over the past 10 years when listening intensely to parents described how their use of the term dyslexia in special education meetings has been met with skepticism, and ignorance, and at times hostility.

It has truly been disturbing in a state that hosts some of the top research facilities in the world studying dyslexia, specifically Yale University and the Haskins Institute.

The ignorance and resistance in our school system regarding dyslexia still exists. In fact, it exists to the extent that just a few days ago a parent shared with me that their school psychologist told them at a PPT meeting that dyslexia didn't even exist.

I wish I had the time today to read to you the

names of almost 600 Connecticut children that we have diagnosed with dyslexia over the past decade. It pains me to relate to you that, although the vast majority of these children, some of which you actually heard from today, had formal IEPs. Only about five, not five percent, five of these children ever had dyslexia even added to the IEP as a note in the notes of the IEP as the cause of their chronic learning difficulty, even after it was formally diagnosed.

The result of this lack of proper visibility to their specific neurological profile of dyslexia can seriously curtail proper intervention and curtail constructive engagement between the parents and educators.

While I strongly support adding dyslexia to the IEP, simply adding dyslexia to the form is not enough, although it is a monumental start. Guidelines also need to be established to ensure that the indication of dyslexia is based on the proper medical identification by a licensed and practicing psychologist or neuropsychologist, in the same way that ADHD must be validated by a medical professional.

To make this more apparent, I would suggest that the term developmental dyslexia be used on the form in lieu of simply dyslexia, so that the designation will be in line with the medical diagnostic terminology used in the ICD-9/10.

In addition, a significant effort to provide the appropriate level of understanding about dyslexia to educators and school psychologists must be aggressively pursued. Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for that very thoughtful testimony.

Are there questions from members of the committee? If not, really I do thank you. I think that you've given reference to some sources of definitions that, as a committee, we will look at. We reference one definitional source in our bill, but we'll be thinking about this ICD 9/10 definition as we look at the bill going forward. So I thank you for that.

Is Jessica Glassman still here? If memory serves, you may have had a son who spoke earlier.

JESSICA GLASSMAN: I did. Adam spoke earlier.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: And you managed to get him out of here?

JESSICA GLASSMAN: I did. My husband brought him home. He couldn't have waited this long. We've been here since 8:30 this morning.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Well, thank you for your patience through this long day. Please, the floor is yours.

JESSICA GLASSMAN: Well, thank you.

I'm speaking in support of Bill RHB 5562, Section 1, an act concerning special education. You have my written testimony. I'm going to sum off what I said, and, actually, I have notes all over. There's some extra things that I'd like to say.

I am not only a parent of a dyslexic son. I'm also an educator. I'm a reading specialist, so I've sat on both sides of the PPT table. It's very different views from the two sides, from what you say as a school and parents believing you and what you hear as a parent.

I live in Orange, Connecticut, and if my son were given the proper interventions and the teachers had the proper training, my son's story may not be what it is.

My son's story at this point, if this bill is not passed, we'll just join the others past and future of lost opportunity of all the children you heard here today and all the children sitting in classrooms today whose stories are not being heard, and a lot of them not identified.

I've been told everything from my child is just being lazy, to try a little bit harder, and he would do just fine. I was told at a recent PPT, when I asked for assistive technology, the teacher looked at me, and on audiotape because I now tape all of the meetings, she said to me, "I believe that all children just need to learn how to read and using an iPad to follow along with the text is not reading."

In kindergarten I actually had my own child identified by a neuropsychologist. The school did not want to help me, other than putting my son in tiered interventions.

The kindergarten teacher is the last teacher to ever speak with me alone. I do have another child, and they have no problem speaking to me about him. He is not dyslexic and has no disability. There are always at least two other people at the table. I cannot call the teacher. There's always somebody else on the phone. Even if it's just a simple matter, not having to do with his special education, they will not speak to me. So I've joked that I think my picture is up somewhere, and they're throwing darts at it.

He has a high IQ. It was found in kindergarten, just like all of the other kids that you've heard today, and the school just said he just needed more time and would not take his identification. It took an independent evaluation that I had the school have done. Their evaluation and a lot of fighting to actually get him to get services. He was diagnosed in third grade.

I do have to say as a teacher that I have tried to get training, and even asking as a teacher for training, it's very hard to get. I've asked for the Gillingham training, and I have not been able to get it. My school has denied me that, saying it's not needed. They have bought up plenty of programs, but we don't get the training that goes with it. And I'm a reading specialist. I work with tier-3 students, and we don't have the training that's needed, even when we ask for it. We're not given that training. So teacher training is very important.

Someone already spoke about Yale and the research that's done there. Connecticut really needs to catch up with the research that's been done there.

(Inaudible) and I ask that you, please, don't let my son's story, along with all of these other great students who spoke today, join all that have passed before them in the schools. They deserve the same education as their non-dyslexic peers. Please help them and others by supporting and passing this bill. Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you.

So I have to say, you know, it's been a long day, but you said something that I don't think we've heard here today before. You're a

reading teacher --

JESSICA GLASSMAN: Yeah.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: -- who wanted specific training -

JESSICA GLASSMAN: Yeah.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: -- to address the challenges of dyslexia, and you were told, sorry, there's no such training that we can provide to you. Is that a fair summary?

JESSICA GLASSMAN: I was told I couldn't go for more training. In between administrators, I was actually able to at one point. I've been teaching for 15 years. I've been able to go for 30 hours of Orton-Gillingham. It did not certify me, but when I went back all excited -- I learned all of this new stuff over the summer and took my own time; they paid, but I took my time -- they were not willing to send me for the rest of the training. And the most important part of the training is when you're working with another person, and they're watching you do it and helping you through it. So I have book knowledge, but I do not have the rest that goes along with it. You really need a practicum to go along with it.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: And is there anyone in your school district who does have the training?

JESSICA GLASSMAN: No. I went with one other teacher, and I can tell you that, in my district, there is not one person in the school that knows about dyslexia.

We just had a student recently, who I'm 100 percent sure was dyslexic that I worked with, and when I told the school before the PPT

meeting that I thought he was dyslexic, they said, "We don't identify that," which is what I've been told in my own child's school.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for your candor. It's extremely disturbing. I appreciate it.

Representative Cook.

REP. COOK: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your testimony from one mother to another who has gone through exactly what you're talking about.

My question is, at the very beginning when you were trying to have him diagnosed, did the school diagnose him with something else, or how did you go about the final diagnosis of dyslexia? Could you explain?

JESSICA GLASSMAN: Sure. The school would not diagnose him. They just put him in the tiers. They told me that it was too early, and he was too young. He hit a wall, like a lot of other children, when it was time to read words. He went in with all the basic skills but was not able to do the work. Midyear kindergarten, I was told that he was still not reading at all, when his peers were reading.

So when they wouldn't do testing, I scheduled an appointment with a neuropsychologist, and I had him assessed myself. She told me she felt he was most likely dyslexic, but even she told me he was too young. Now I know that that's not correct that a child is too young.

REP. COOK: So the final diagnosis came from an outside source?

JESSICA GLASSMAN: When I had him diagnosed in third

grade, I brought him back to the same neuropsychologist because his data points are not catching up. The school keeps telling you he's doing fine, and he's not catching up. And, actually, I have his tri-annual coming up, and a little birdie told me they might not qualify him because he's too smart and too qualified. That's what I've been told.

REP. COOK: I don't even know what to say after that one, but -- and I understand that the school does not recognize, and as you've been sitting here you've heard that I understand all that.

But I guess my biggest problem is the fact that the school won't identify it for the same fear is that they don't want to have to pay.

So when you went to have him tested, did you pay for that out of pocket and submit the bill back to the Board of Education, or did you just swallow that cost?

JESSICA GLASSMAN: I took the cost on my own. I was lucky enough that my health insurance did cover part of the diagnosis.

REP. COOK: Okay. Thank you for your information.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Representative Carpino.

REP. CARPINO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to all the parents that have been sitting her.

Very disappointed in the stories that I'm hearing, and I feel awful that some of these schools have failed your children. So thank you so much for coming.

But I want to put you on the spot a little bit and hope that you can help me. I know that we look to our literacy specialists in the schools to be exactly what they put themselves out to be, premier individuals to help all of our students read and succeed.

What specific training should these literacy specialists have under their belt? What is the gold standard, and what does it entail, so that they can make the identification because some of the themes that I've heard over and over again is that they've been unable? As well-intentioned as some of the teachers may have been, that they simply lack the skill set to identify.

Can you comment on the gold standard, since you seem to have started the program, what that entails?

JESSICA GLASSMAN: We need more assessments in our schools. I have to say as a reading specialist, I do not have access to any assessments, any formal assessments. I have my own informal assessments that I do with students. But anytime we go to PPT, it's always sent to the psychologists and the special ed. teachers to do testing. And I truly believe that all reading specialists and special ed. teachers really need to have the Orton-Gillingham training because the real research would show that it really does change the brain.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Any other questions? If not, thank you very much for your patience, and your time --

JESSICA GLASSMAN: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: -- and advocacy. Is Megan

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implementation. It's nothing without that piece.

REP. LAVIELLE: Sounds like it has all been pretty vague.

SUE HAYNIE: Yes.

REP. LAVIELLE: That's a big understatement and probably too polite, but thank you --

SUE HAYNIE: Thank you.

REP. LAVIELLE: -- for that perspective. We appreciate you being here, and this has been a very, very informative window into this problem that's been plaguing students for a long time.

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you.

SUE HAYNIE: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Any other questions? If not, thank you very much for your testimony --

SUE HAYNIE: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: -- your time, and your advocacy.

Is Lisa Davenport still here?

LISA DAVENPORT: I am still here. Folks, if I knew we were going to be here this long, I would have made you cookies.

So you all had the wonderful opportunity to meet my little Joey this morning. Little Joey is 6 foot tall, 195, sitting here with Senator Fasano and Representative Candelaria.

HB562

I have tossed my testimony aside. You don't need to hear what everybody else said. Instead, I decided to help you a little bit by assisting Joey in answering some of the questions you raised.

Some of the questions you raised were, you know, what happened in the beginning. He was privately tested in first grade, in the very beginning of his first grade. The psychologist said that he has a visual processing disorder, but you need to have him retested third, at the absolute latest fourth grade, Mr. and Mrs. Davenport. We did exactly that. The school did it, and they told us what we have in place with his special ed. program is fine. He is progressing.

Well, when I asked him, you know, "I have a daughter that's six years old, and things just don't seem to be progressing on the same level," they said, "Well, don't worry, Mrs. Davenport. He started out at a level 12, and, look, now he's at a level 14." What does that mean? "Well, he was at a level 12. Now he's at a level 14."

I heard that all the way through fifth and sixth grade. In seventh grade, this kid who had glowing recommendations on his performance -- and what I mean by that is constantly never giving up, always smiling, always saying no, no, no. I'll try again. I'll try again -- was said to have a disciplinary problem. A disciplinary problem? Well, my husband sat right up and said, "If he has a disciplinary problem, then you'd better discipline him." All of a sudden he was a disciplinary problem. So we had him privately tested.

He told you himself that the testing was

devastating. He was reading on the third grade level in seventh grade and decoding on a kindergarten level. Not only had the public school failed him, but my husband and I felt we had failed him. We thought we were answering all the right -- or asking all the right questions.

Well, Joey only got the help he got and is now reading on probably close to a seventh grade level -- I would have to ask Les if I'm right on that exactly -- because I had to threaten a lawsuit. I don't want any other parent to have to go through what we've gone through.

It's not necessarily the teacher's fault. They didn't know what to look for.

I will wrap up quickly. I would be remiss in not mentioning what an outstanding kid my kid is. When we met with that psychologist and she told us the results of his testing in seventh grade, the first thing she said to us is, "Lisa and Joe Davenport, you are amazing parents." Anybody that says that before they're about to give you the results of testing has got to be pretty frightening. Said sad, "Any other kid would be clinically depressed right now. I don't know what you're doing."

He is a Life Scout. He continually gives back to his community. He is in the middle of an enormous Eagle Scout project. He is erecting a 20 x 30 pavilion at the Durham Fairgrounds.

This is your future that stood up in front of you. We cannot continue to fail these kids. And to reference the automotive manual, the best thing about those is there's a lot of pictures.

So if you have any questions. I know I'm at

the end. It's been an exhausting day. I'd be more than happy to answer any. If not, it's fine.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you very much, and it really is remarkable that during all those years where your son was not getting the reading instruction that he deserved, that you managed through whatever you did to keep his spirits up because that had to be dispiriting for him. So it's a great testimony to your commitment and support as a mother.

LISA DAVENPORT: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: And I'm sure your husband's work as a dad too.

LISA DAVENPORT: Yeah. He's okay. He's back there.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: He was filming you as you testified.

LISA DAVENPORT: Oh, great.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Are there questions for the witness? Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA: Lisa, I would thank you for being here and waiting all this time, but I know there's no other place you would be.

LISA DAVENPORT: You're absolutely right, Noreen. Yes.

REP. KOKORUDA: But I want to thank you and all the parents really. You have been part of one of the most powerful public hearings I know most of us sat through. Those of us who have been here, you know, maybe less than 10 years, and your son was wonderful. The kids were great today.

You know, there's so many things we talk about in this building. It is so hard to find solutions, and this one seems like we can do it. We should be doing it, and I think you've heard today all of us will work really hard to make sure. We listened to what all of you said today. This was a pretty incredible day. Thank you, Lisa.

LISA DAVENPORT: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for your testimony and all the parents that are here.

You know, you made a comment that nobody here believes; that you said that you failed as a parent on this issue, and nobody believes that. But I'll say the same because you guys are learning something about your child and what they're going through, and you're reacting to it. Now, we're going to do the same because we're learning because, to be honest with you, this is not -- I shouldn't say the term is new to us, but how it's being dealt with in our school system is something that we need to address.

So I want to thank all of you for coming out tonight and enlightening us, and now we just need to react. So I hope you don't think we're failures by not knowing, and that what we should do is work on behalf of our constituents; and that's what we're going to do. So thank you.

And thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Chairman.

LISA DAVENPORT: Thank you. I would like to add that one of the questions earlier was do you think that the newer system -- or in the 80s, was it easier to learn if you were dyslexic.

One of the things Les at the DIA Institute said that I needed to do was attend classes with Joey once a week, and I did it for a year and a half. Les has not tested me, but I learned more with Les than I did when I was in school. So that whole genetic thing, I'm sure if he tested me, I would be dyslexia myself.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: You seem to have done pretty well.

LISA DAVENPORT: Thank you.

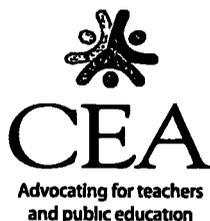
REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you.

At this point we've exhausted the list of people who had signed up. Is there anyone in the room who wishes to testify who wasn't on the list?

Please come forward, give your name and hometown for the record, and you get your three minutes of fame.

VIOLET SIMS: All right. Good evening. Thank you for the opportunity.

I'm Violet Sims, Violet Jimenez-Sims from New Britain, Connecticut. I'm here in support of SB 476, particularly the extension of bilingual education from the current 30-month limit to 60 months. Additionally, I urge the consideration of further legislation or expansion of the language in the current bill to more clearly define bilingual education, exempt ELLs from high stakes testing for at least 30 months, and require that the Connecticut State Department



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Ray Rossomando and Bob Namnoum
Connecticut Education Association
Before the
Education Committee

Regarding:
SB 472 AAC State Funding for Education and the Budgets of Boards of
Education
HB 5562 AAC Special Education
HB 5565 AAC the Minimum Budget Requirement
HB 5567 AAC Alternative Schools
SB 476 AAC the Academic Achievement Gap

March 17, 2014

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Ray Rossomando, Research and Policy Development Specialist with the Connecticut Education Association. Bob Namnoum is a UniServ Representative who works directly with local affiliates and their respective boards of education. Mr. Namnoum also serves on the MORE Commission Special Education Select Working Group.

We are here today testifying on a number of bills being heard:

**SB 472 AAC State Funding for Education and the Budgets of Boards
of Education**

CEA supports provisions of this bill that reaffirm prohibitions against state education grants (i.e. ECS/Alliance grants) being supplanted or diverted to municipal accounts for non-education uses. Schools are continually being asked to do more and more with state funding that does not keep pace with needs and demands. CEA urges the committee to strengthen the non-supplant clause that is the subject of this section.

CEA reserves judgment on section 3, which appears to sunset a statutory provision that provides \$2.9 million to certain Priority School Districts.

CEA also reserves judgment on sections 4 and 6, which change the definition of real program expenditures (RPE) to include transportation and shift base per pupil funding levels for local charter schools from net current expenditures (NCE) to current program expenditures (CPE). The variables that comprise NCE and CPE are not the same. For example, NCE contains federal funding, as well as private and tuition sources – CPE does not. CPE contains transportation costs, NCE does not. The impact of these changes and their potential impact on other grants that reference these NCE, CPE, and RPE are unclear.

SB 476 AAC the Academic Achievement Gap

CEA supports section 2 of SB 476, which extends bi-lingual program duration from 30 months to 60.

CEA supports expanding full-day kindergarten into every district in the state. Unequal access to full-day kindergarten means some children start first grade further behind their peers in neighboring districts. This should not be the case.

However, SB 476 permits Alliance Districts to include all-day kindergarten expansion in their ECS-related Alliance District plans. As many know, ECS is significantly underfunded; Alliance Districts alone are underfunded by \$490 million. The Education Reform Act of 2012 created Alliance Districts and required, for the first time, that districts would have to apply to the commissioner of education for approval to receive a portion of their ECS underfunding.

CEA believes that Alliance Districts should not be required to jump through hoops in order to obtain ECS funds already due to them. Moreover, ECS funding for Alliance Districts has been insufficient to cover the new tasks required by the SDE.

Therefore, we remain concerned that Alliance Districts will not receive sufficient ECS funding to carry out their Alliance District plans, whether they include plans for full-day kindergarten or not.

CEA has advocated and continues to advocate for the expansion of full-day kindergarten statewide and urges the Education Committee to seek out innovative strategies for funding the start up of new programs beyond the limits of Alliance District ECS funding that is proposed for this year.

HB 5562 AAC Special Education

CEA strongly supports the efforts of Senator Osten reflected in sections 1 and 2, which designates dyslexia as a specific disability on IEP forms. Dyslexia is the most common form of learning disability, resulting in 18-20 percent of children struggling to read. Because of this prevalence, and related struggles parents encounter when seeking proper diagnosis and needed services, CEA believes that it is appropriate to add dyslexia to the list of eligible special education disabilities.

CEA does not support section 3 as written. Section 3 changes the state and local funding relationship with respect to special education costs (excess costs) that exceed local per pupil expenditures (PPE). The formula in the bill does not appear to address who pays excess costs between a district's PPE and 1½ times PPE. It simply doesn't add up.

Furthermore, the recent Task Force to Study State Education Funding (2011-13) and the MORE Commission Special Education Select Working Group (2013-14) brought together various leaders and specialists on this topic. The work of these entities does not appear to be reflected

in HB 5562. Consequently, CEA reserves judgment on this section until the formula is clearer and various special education funding options have been reviewed.

Connecticut school districts spend about \$1.7 billion on special education services a year, accounting for about 22% of all spending on schools. State law requires the State Department of Education to reimburse districts for excess costs that exceed 4½ times PPE. For FY15, the cost to implement this law was estimated to be about \$186 million. The state's Excess Cost grant is capped at \$140 million – a bit shy of current law and a far cry from the total need.

CEA continues to strongly support increases to special education funding grants from state and federal sources. Special education is an incredibly significant federal mandate and is indisputably a state obligation under the Connecticut's constitution. We urge the education committee to review the work of the MORE Commission and education funding task force as it considers formulas that increase the state's share of special education costs.

HB 5565 AAC the Minimum Budget Requirement

CEA interprets the impact of HB 5565 as preventing a municipality with separate regional and local school budgets from decreasing its budgeted appropriation for its local schools year-to-year.

CEA supports strong MBR protections that prevent municipalities from withholding needed resources from local schools. Such protections are especially important at a time when the Education Cost Sharing grant remains significantly underfunded and schools are asked to do so much.

HB 5567 AAC Alternative Schools

CEA supports HB 5567.

The current system of alternative education has resulted in the creation of some very high quality programs. However, not every area of the state is served by such programs. CEA supports enhancements to alternative school programs that promote equal opportunity to consistent high-quality programs across the state. Additionally, section 5 permits districts to provide alternative settings collaboratively. We believe that this option will help ensure that programs can be provided cost-effectively.

Alternative education programs can offer greater education opportunities to students who have not succeeded in the standard setting. When done well, they can provide targeted programming, more individualized attention, and creative delivery solutions for students facing unique challenges. However, their proliferation could also result in the creation of a second-class system and perceptions of tracking or steering students. It is vitally important that alternative education programs are kept to high standards, taught and run by certified educators, and are recognized by parents, employers, and institutions of higher education as comparable to any other local school.

We also caution lawmakers to not inadvertently open a door to the private management of alternative schools. The result could mean turning over schools to third parties that are less-accountable to the public and risk exposing some of our most needy students to a counter-productive experience.

Thank you.

State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



COMMISSION ON CHILDREN

Testimony before the Education Committee
Submitted by Steven Hernández, Esq., Director of Public Policy and Research
Connecticut Commission on Children
March 17, 2014

Honorable Co-chairs, Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischmann, Ranking and other esteemed members of the Education Committee:

My name is Steven Hernández, Attorney and Director of Public Policy and Research for the Connecticut Commission on Children. I am here to offer the Commission's testimony in support of:

- S.B. No. 476; An Act Concerning The Academic Achievement Gap;
- H.B. No. 5562; An Act Concerning Special Education; and
- H.B. No. 5564; An Act Concerning School Safety. /

I will focus the bulk of my testimony in support of House Bill 5564, *An Act Concerning School Safety*.

"School climate matters." According to Amrit Thapa at the National School Climate Center, the promotion of positive school climate impacts every aspect of a child's educational experience. "Sustained positive school climate is associated with positive child and youth development, effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts, student learning and academic achievement, increased student graduation rates, and teacher retention."

Mr. Thapa cited national and global research documenting the correlation between positive school climate and student motivation to learn, a mitigating effect on socioeconomic distress, and diminished aggression, violence and sexual harassment.

The Center draws a clear connection between the quality of school climate and improved academic outcomes as well as student personal development and well-being. I have attached the National Center for School Climate's Research Brief to my submitted testimony, and would be happy to supplement that with relevant research.

This January, Secretary Duncan at the U.S. Department of Education released a variety of resources on school climate and safety. He noted that "positive school climates also enhance safety in the school and community by increasing communication among students, families, and faculty, and reducing violence and bullying." Those resources may be found at ED.GOV and I would gladly provide them to the Committee.

Recognizing that bullying intervention and positive school climate (a form of prevention) go hand in hand, in 2011, through the leadership of this committee, the general assembly revised our anti-bullying laws to strengthen our efforts to improve school climate and prevent and address school bullying.

The law required—among other things—that each school board develop and implement a safe school climate plan, that each superintendent appoint a district safe school climate coordinator, and that the principal of each school serve as a safe school climate specialist.

After 12/14, when the state and the world was touched by Newtown, the state again led the way in making the necessary connection between positive school climate and school safety. School climate is to school safety as bullying is to individual student safety, and your bill today is the next step in making that connection.

In addition to establishing a safe travel to school grant program and providing a clearinghouse for information and assistance through the 2-1-1 Infoline program, HB 5564 would authorize the Department of Ed. to approve or reject local and regional school climate plans. Your bill would also require the analysis of student perspectives and opinions, which would be a key part of a school-based climate assessment survey.

As such, your bill is about leadership, accountability, and including the student voice as both the consumer and inheritor of your best efforts.

The Commission would recommend additional modest but important changes to our school climate law intended to strengthen the definition of bullying, and improve bullying enforcement, by clarifying areas in the law that parents, principals or the SDE find confusing or contradictory. In no way are these changes intended to dilute the definition of bullying or its enforcement, but they are aimed at diminishing both technical and interpreted hurdles with the dual goal of protecting our kids and improving their learning environment.

Specifically, we recommend strengthening the role of the school climate committee to align with its new role in working to help improve school safety, giving that committee the ability to use school climate surveys to create a strategy for positive school climate, and allowing the school principal to focus on intervening in and investigating acts of alleged bullying.

We further recommend clarifying the meeting requirement with parents at the conclusion of a bullying investigation, as principals and Superintendents have reported that the paragraph could and has been read to require that this meeting be held at the same time, with both the bully and the victim in the same room. As we know, research does not support putting the families of the bully and the target together.

I have attached these and other recommendations to my testimony, along with an analysis and rationale for each. The Commission would welcome the opportunity to assist in any way that we can to improve student safety, school climate, and to reduce incidents of bullying on our state.

In support of **S.B. No. 476, An Act Concerning The Academic Achievement Gap**, we note that research shows that full-day kindergarten helps improve student outcomes and close achievement gaps. According to the National Education Association, Full-day

kindergarten is a sound educational investment. Research demonstrates that full-day kindergarten, though initially more costly than half-day kindergarten, is worth the expense. Full-day kindergarten not only boosts students' academic achievement, it also improves their social and emotional skills. This is a gap-closing strategy, so it is prudent that all children in our alliance districts enjoy the benefits of full-day kindergarten.

We also support increasing the amount of time a student may spend in bilingual education from thirty months to sixty months. As recently reported in a working draft of the achievement gap task force master plan to close the achievement gap by 2020, strategies aimed at addressing the needs of our diverse English Language Learners are necessary to address the achievement gaps that exist and lead the nation in addressing this longstanding disparity.

Finally, we would recommend that the Committee buttress the state's on-going, successful literacy interventions through the authorization and funding of a cabinet-level Literacy Officer at SDE. On the afternoon of April 8, the Commission together with the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus will be hosting the states of FL and CO, both of which have created a reading officer at the highest levels of government, whose sole purpose is to oversee the research-based and resource rich support that schools need to close the achievement gap in reading.

Finally, regarding H.B. No. 5562, An Act Concerning Special Education, the Commission strongly supports including dyslexia on the individualized education program form. The IEP process is the most comprehensive and targeted method of ensuring that each student with a disability gets the help needed to thrive in school. While language is hardwired into the human brain, reading is not. Reading is a skill that some children have more difficulty developing than others. According to KidsHealth, "about 15% to 20% of the U.S. population has the specific reading disability called dyslexia, which is the major cause of reading failure in school. Dealing with this learning challenge can lead to frustration and self-doubt, especially when it goes undiagnosed for a long time. The good news is that dyslexia can be identified early and kids who have it can be taught to become successful readers." Your bill is critical to their success.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be honored to address any questions the Committee may have, or to provide further data or documentation "off-line."

Testimony

Hi, My name is Dawn Learsy and this is my son Otto Learsy-Cahill. He is dyslexic and so am I. Because of Otto's genetic tendency for dyslexia, I was rhyming with him, and going over the alphabet, before he could walk. Otto went to a "free play" focused preschool where he had a wonderful time, but early literacy skills were not stressed.

HB5562

In kindergarten, Otto's personality started to change. Otto was a boisterous boy with many friends in preschool, but I started noticing that he was becoming quiet and cautious. From a child who always had something to say, I was told by his teacher that he now avoided raising his hand in class. His teacher noted that he was progressing slowly in his reading skills. I mention that Otto had a family history of dyslexia. I was starting to panic but I was assured by his teacher that Otto's slow progress was still within normal range. We left it at that. His kindergarten teacher was wonderful with the kids. They loved her, she was smart, seasoned and has seen many children mature and catch up. By the end of kindergarten Otto had a few words he could recognize and reading books (books being read to him) had moved - from being one of the top, most loved activities to just above eating broccoli. He was unwilling to go over the "boring alphabet". A week before first grade Otto developed tics.

In first grade, Otto's transformation from leader of the pack to a child who preferred to sit in the back of the room continued. Otto, who had had tons of friends in preschool, now had only a few kids he related too. I could not blame these changes on pressures of transitioning from a well loved preschool to his new school, now an old school. The mild mother's panic I had in kindergarten was starting to get stronger. When I visited his class as the "secret reader", I saw one of the class's finished writing projects displayed. The final products were posted on one of those huge floor to ceiling pin boards. The title of the project was "Things I like". Each child had a photo of themselves pasted on top of a piece of off-white paper. One child, wrote "My dog Sally" with a crayon figure of dog with an exaggerated red leash, other children scrawled names of the people in their family, some of the children wrote long sentences. One child wrote "vacation" with a blue sky, and a rectangular beach and huge sun, only cut off by the corners of the paper. I looked for Otto's. There was his picture. He had a picture of five people, a house, and some crayon markings. Not a word. Not even a letter. It was an illustration.

During his first teacher's conference of first grade, I was told again that Otto got along well with the other kids, he was well behaved, and when he spoke in class - which was rare - he had insightful things to say, and his reading was progressing slowly. I asked the teacher if there was anything I or the school could do to support him. She assured me she would continue to watch his progress. After this meeting, and seeing his work, and comparing his work to his classmates, coupled with his family history of dyslexia, plus the more disturbing soft signs of depression and anxiety, I decided to have him tested. According to the Speech and Language evaluation, he scored so low in phonemic awareness that they were unable to give me a score. (phonemic awareness is one of the key deficits in dyslexia) I sent the results to the school with a letter requesting that Otto receive extra support. After my first PPT, Otto started getting extra help in reading, but this was already in the middle of his first grade year. By the end of first grade it was obvious to all the adults that worked with him at school, that Otto was having real trouble learning to read. He had now fallen far behind his classmates. He had failed RTI (Response to Intervention). Otto was given a full battery of psychological and achievement tests and thereafter was designated for special education. Otto, on other hand, was able to hide his difficulties from his classmates, but would wistfully come and tell me about the other kids who were already reading chapter books.

In second grade, with special help Otto started to make gains in his reading. Yet, the overall early academic experience had changed my extroverted baby boy into my introverted big boy. He found a good friend in second grade, who also went to special ed. Otto started to come out of his shell.

In third grade when the focus was "read to learn". Otto was still behind but was catching up. Between having a good friend and catching up to the other kids, third grade was wonderful. Unfortunately fourth grade was around the corner.

In fourth grade, Otto had to not only read to learn but now, he had to spell and write. He would get 100 percent right on his spelling tests, but was unable to repeat the performance with the same words a week later. Even the simplest words were misspelled. Otto could memorize but he still was unable to encode. This was also complicated by the fact that in fourth grade his best friend left school and now the other kids noticed Otto's difficulties and they were not nice. In fourth grade your academic and social worth is literally spelled out. However, Otto persisted, despite the social isolation, and academic frustration, by the end of fourth grade he was at grade level for reading, grade level for writing, but still below grade level for spelling. He had also been diagnosed with depression.

Fourth Grade is also the time that Otto received his triennial review. During that review, I was told that Otto was going to lose his services in Middle School, because he was at grade level in reading and writing and

had done exceptionally well on his overall CMT scores, despite not reaching mastery in many of the subsets. Also, his triennial testing had revealed 3 Standard deviations difference between his verbal abilities and his non verbal abilities. In the old discrepancy model, there would be no question that my son would be qualified for help. My son is what is called twice exceptional, gifted and dyslexic. So here we are again, at crossroads. My son is now OK in fifth grade. He still can not spell even simple words and his writing is hampered by this inability. I feel these problems are not being directly addressed in special education. He has lost some of his early literacy skills, which again are revealed in his spelling/ encoding. He still is uncomfortable reading aloud, and when he does he has obvious fluency problems, as well as problems with decoding multisyllabic words.

In Middle School, with all its new demands of independence and complexities of social growth, I would think that he would need more help, not less. Otto is a great kid: kind, considerate, funny, hardworking, smart, and an excellent baseball player, but he still needs help. Please make sure kids like him get the help they need in a timely fashion, and receive support as long as they need it, in order that they may be successful, and please do not discriminate against kids because of pre-prescribed levels of need.

Thank you for listening.

Subject: Megan Schrade, Testimony - HRB No. 5562
From: mlee_1225@hotmail.com
Date: Mon, 17 Mar 2014
To: Edtestimony@cga.ct.gov

Thank you Representative Fleischman, Senator Stillman and Education Committee Members for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Megan Schrade, I am the parent of a 7 year old dyslexic child named Luke. I am in support of Bill No. 5562, An Act Concerning Special Education.

My son, Luke, was diagnosed with Dyslexia last year when he was in the 1st grade. Having worked in the field of Special Education, I was concerned about certain aspects of my son's development since he was in preschool. I even questioned whether or not he could be dyslexic at that young age. I knew he wasn't learning the letters of the alphabet the way most children his age were, he didn't consistently recognize his own name in print, he didn't seem to catch on to the concept of rhyming, and he seemed to have an aversion to writing and drawing. These things became more noticeable and problematic as he entered school, and he received reading intervention in kindergarten and 1st grade. Both schools he attended (we moved prior to the start of 1st grade) used Wilson Foundations, and his intervention consisted of more intensive work with this program in the context of a small group. By mid 1st grade, he was still significantly behind his peers in reading, and his teachers and I agreed that the current protocol was not enough for him.

When I told his teacher and reading tutor that I suspected he was dyslexic, they replied that most children are not identified as dyslexic until 3rd or 4th grade, and they would continue to watch him and monitor his progress. I knew I could have him privately tested, and despite the fact that it did not come at the best time financially for us, we decided to have him tested at the cost of \$1800. This was a difficult decision on our part, and one that many families are not in the position to make, but we wanted him to have a clear diagnosis, so he could begin to get the right type of intervention. He was diagnosed as having severe Dyslexia at 6 years old. However, I was told by the clinician who tested him that the earliest a child could be identified with Dyslexia is at 4 years 9mo of age. Considering I had been concerned since he was in preschool, he could've been identified much earlier than he was, and certainly much earlier than 3rd or 4th grade, as suggested by his teachers. This lack of professional awareness needs to be addressed in order to get dyslexic students on the right path to learning as quickly as possible.

I was actually happy when he was diagnosed, because I thought, now we could begin to fix it. However, I learned that even though we had a diagnosis, the school could only list him as having a "Specific Learning Disability" because the law does not currently require Dyslexia to be recognized specifically on a child's IEP. A designation of "SLD/Dyslexia" on the IEP form should engage the PPT team in a conversation as to appropriate evidenced based programming for a dyslexic student.

When you take into account that Dyslexia affects 20% of the population, that is 1 in 5 children, the potential cost to school systems by ignoring or under-identifying these students in the early grades is considerable as the longer you wait for interventions, the longer the intervention will take.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Megan Schrade
Oxford, CT



SHORELINE PEDIATRIC NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES, L.L.C.
ASSESSMENT AND CONSULTATION SERVICES

SHELLEY F. PELLETIER, PH.D, NCSP, ABPP
BOARD CERTIFIED IN CLINICAL NEUROPSYCHOLOGY
BOARD CERTIFIED IN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY
LICENSED PSYCHOLOGIST

Testimony re. RHB 5562, Section 1, An Act Concerning Special Education

I am both a board certified school psychologist and a clinical neuropsychologist, with a private practice in Old Saybrook, Connecticut. I work with children who have a wide range of educational, social, and emotional difficulties. Many of these children have reading disabilities. Although the term dyslexia is presently included in educational law, many schools fail to acknowledge or intervene with students who have been diagnosed with dyslexia, perhaps because it is seen as an isolated problem or because staff members are not trained to provide effective treatments.

Dyslexia is a term used to describe students who display a particular pattern of reading impairment (Shaywitz, 2005). It is not the only type of reading disability, and the term should not be used to classify all students with reading problems (Cutting, et. al., 2013). However, it is a term that accurately describes a subset of students with impairments in word decoding. It is not characterized by writing or reading letters backwards, a common misperception. Typically, students with dyslexia have specific impairments in phonological processing. The specific presentation of these students may vary over time as a function of development, yet the term dyslexia may continue to accurately describe the presentation. While having an additional box on an IEP may enable identification of students who have been identified, it does not serve to help school staff member identify struggling readers who may have dyslexia.

Unfortunately, I have been aware of several cases where school districts have encouraged parents to obtain external evaluations at their own expense, as they claimed dyslexia is a medical condition. I have also seen several students with clear evidence of dyslexia denied appropriate services because they were demonstrating progress, albeit minimal progress, via the response to intervention model.

While I commend the legislature for beginning to promote awareness of dyslexia among educational professionals in Connecticut, further modifications to the bill as written appear warranted. This legislation does not limit services and supports to individuals who may have other forms of reading disabilities. It should help to advance understanding of reading disabilities in general, and at the same time clearly highlight the need for identification and appropriate services for all students, including those with dyslexia.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill. I remain available for further questions.

Respectfully submitted. March 17, 2014

Shelley Pelletier

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Elliott, J. G. and Grigorenko, E. L. (2014). *The Dyslexia Debate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shaywitz, S. (2005). *Overcoming Dyslexia*. New York: Vintage Books.

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RHB 5562, Section 1, An Act Concerning Special Education Testimony**From Jessica Glassman****Orange, Connecticut**

I am speaking in support of Bill RHB 5562, An Act Concerning Special Education. I am requesting changes/additions to be made to this bill to include early screening and identification, a check box on the IEP form for dyslexia and professional development for teachers. I am an educator and parent of a dyslexic son. I live in Orange, Connecticut. That district has a good reputation for educating students, but as a parent of a child with learning challenges, I am very disappointed with my son's education. Without the proper interventions and teacher training, my son's story will join the others past and future of lost opportunity.

After entering kindergarten with all of the basic skills, my child hit a wall when it was time to decode words. It has been a long, lonely and bumpy road to get the school provide a free and appropriate education. They kept telling me that he just needed more time, despite a reading disability diagnosis from a neuropsychologist at the beginning of first grade. It was found that my son had an above average IQ and if given the proper interventions he was capable of success. Time passed by and my son continued to struggle. After returning to the neuropsychologist at the end of third grade, he was diagnosed with dyslexia. The gap just keeps growing between my son's reading achievement and his peers'. Research shows if a child doesn't catch up by 3rd grade, their chances of ever catching up to peers decline significantly. My son is now is 4th grade and will now need more intense interventions. The teachers don't understand how to give my child the proper interventions to close the gap.

Dyslexic students need to be identified early and given scientifically researched based interventions, when deficiencies are first noticed. Yale has done extensive research and has proven, using MRI scans, that a dyslexic brain can change with specific interventions. Orton Gillingham is one of the most effective techniques for dyslexic students, yet most schools don't have any certified instructors. If my son received proper interventions early, he would not still struggle to read and spell. If dyslexia had its own checkbox on the IEP and were properly defined, schools would have a basis for identification. My son is lumped with a wide variety of students who have varying disabilities. Teacher training on dyslexia is also a key part for educating our children. Currently teachers know little to nothing about dyslexia, which is proven when I am told my son is "being lazy" or "needs to try a little harder." Being an educator, I can tell you that almost all of my colleagues know little to nothing about dyslexia. Unless a teacher has sought information on their own, they don't truly understand these students, since it is not taught in teacher prep programs or at school professional development. My son tries his best and is sometimes unable to show what he knows because of his disability. The State of Connecticut needs to catch up with current research, especially since much of it was done right here in our own state. Please don't let my son's story along with all the other students who spoke today join the many that have past before them. Our children deserve the same educational opportunities as their non-dyslexic peers. Help them and others to succeed by supporting and passing this bill. Thank you in advance for your support.

Sc9/15c

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Keys to a Successful Alternative Education Program
Revised 6/18/08

- **NAME AND LOCATION**
 - Student input into program name and identity
 - Off campus location (or a definite area designated for alternative education only) including access to technology and a gymnasium or a recreational area

- **PHILOSOPHY**
 - A well-defined mission and entry procedure, and flexibility in graduation requirements
 - Not a transition program – students can graduate from the program
 - A privilege, not a right – students may be exited from the program for not maintaining/achieving stated criteria

- **STUDENTS**
 - Create a student profile and limit the student to teacher ratio to 12:1
 - Avoid being a dumping ground – a school of choice (The student, staff, and parent/guardian must agree that the placement is correct)
 - A “Code of Conduct” fashioned and agreed upon by both students and staff and emphasizing fairness
 - Including a probationary period, a policy and process exists for ongoing evaluation of student appropriateness

- **CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**
 - High-interest curriculum with an emphasis on life-skills
 - Include a work component for credit
 - Flexibility in interpreting H.S. curriculum
 - Students meet standardized measures of learning through diverse assessments and with appropriate support
 - Emphasis on 3 R’s: Relationships, Relevance, Rigor

- **STAFF**
 - Flexible, caring staff along with consistent access to assigned support personnel
 - Staff freely chooses to teach within the program
 - Staff members reflect a holistic perspective of care for students including personal, social, emotional, intellectual, life success, and safety/security elements

- **SUPPORT**
 - Membership in a support group such as CAASP (Connecticut Association of Alternative Schools and Programs)
 - Seek community, school board, and administrative support through public relations, communications, and accurate tracking of current students and graduates
 - Reasonable budget and budget autonomy

Mr Chairman, Senators, Representatives and Guests.

I'd like to express my support for bill HB5562 recognizing Dyslexia as a disability in our public schools. Identification and intervention for children with dyslexia is critical to success of their education. With a clearer understanding of dyslexia, teachers and administrators in our Public Schools will be able to identify early on these beautiful minds and educate them appropriately, after all one in five students are most likely dyslexic.

The lack of knowledge and intervention serious problem, for example here's our story....

Our son Joey is dyslexic. For years my husband Joe and I worked with our local schools trying desperately to assist Joey with his academic struggles. In 7th grade we were told our son Joey, who had been always a respectful, hard working student was now a disciplinary problem. Out of sheer frustration, we had Joey privately tested, the results were devastating and disturbing. Joey had somehow made it through 6 years of education, with reading and decoding levels that were beyond unacceptable, all the while working hard and honestly having glowing reviews on his determination and persistence. In the 7th grade, Joey was reading on a 3rd grade level and decoding on a Kindergarten level, and diagnosed with severe dyslexia. Clearly the public education system had failed him. Imagine our surprise when we were told by our school that this was not a recognized disability! Joey with intense work has made great strides, he's a sophomore in high school and reading on a 7th grade level. He has made great sacrifices to get there, Joey hasn't had a summer vacation for three years. While his friends are enjoying the lazy days of summer he's attending classes times a week, working to learn what he missed for years. He stays after school two days a week adding two hours to his school day and an additional two days a week he is in private tutoring adding minimally three hours to his school day.

I am beyond proud of our son. Joey is an amazing example of the brilliance found in the dyslexic mind. He has an above average IQ, his mechanical aptitude is inspiring and he is incredibly preceptive. I'd be remise in not acknowledging his amazing work ethic and his ability to empathize with others struggling with their education. Hence his determination to be here today to share his story with you.

HB5562 offers assistance that so many children will benefit from, these beautiful minds are our future, I ask you to support this bill.

Sincerely
Lisa Davenport
197 Tuttle Road Durham CT 06422

3/14/2014 DYSLEXIA BILL TESTIMONY

Distinguished Senators and Representatives, I thank you for providing Connecticut residences and myself the opportunity to speak to you about the Act Concerning Special Education (HRB No. 5562) that you are now considering.

My name is Les Fredette. For the past decade, my wife and I have run a center for literacy difficulties caused primarily by Dyslexia and ADHD. I am here today to support the bill before you, believing that, in the long run, it will bring Dyslexia the much needed recognition that it deserves as being the number one cause of chronic reading difficulties for 20% of people around the world who struggle daily with literacy.

As a man of science, I have been disturbed, confused and even appalled at the numerous times over the past 10 years when listening intensely to parents described how their use of the term dyslexia in special education meetings have been met with skepticism and ignorance, and at times hostility.

It has truly been disturbing that in a state that hosts some of the top research facilities in the world studying Dyslexia, specifically Yale University and the Haskins Institute, the ignorance and resistance in our school system regarding Dyslexia still exists. In fact, it exists to the extent that just a few days ago a parent shared with me that their school's psychologist told them in a PPT meeting that dyslexia did not even exist.

I wish I had the time today to read off to you the almost 600 names of Connecticut children that we have diagnosed with Dyslexia over the past decade. It pains me to relate to you that although the vast majority of these children had formal IEPs, only about five of these children had dyslexia added to their IEPs as a note as the cause of their chronic literacy difficulties, even after they had been formally diagnosed. The result of this lack of proper visibility to their specific neurological profile (meaning Dyslexia) can seriously curtail proper intervention and constructive engagement between parents and educators.

While I strongly support adding Dyslexia to the IEP, simply adding Dyslexia to the form is just a monumental start. Guidelines also need to be established to ensure that the indication of Dyslexia is based on the proper medical identification by a licensed and practicing psychologist or neuropsychologist, in the same way that ADHD must be validated by a medical professional. To make this more apparent, I would suggest that the term Developmental Dyslexia be used on the form in lieu of just Dyslexia, so the designation will be in line with the diagnostic terminology used in the ICD-9/10 (International Classification of Diseases). In addition, a significant effort to provide the appropriate level of understanding about Dyslexia to educators and school psychologists must be aggressively pursued.

Thank you for your consideration and time.

Les Fredette
50 West Branch Drive, Hebron, CT 06033
860-228-3422, fredetteleslie@sbcglobal.net

3/14/2014 DYSLEXIA BILL TESTIMONY

Distinguished Senators, Representatives, I thank you for providing Connecticut residences and myself the opportunity to speak to you about the Act Concerning Special Education (HRB No. 5562) that you are now considering.

My name is Susan Fredette. For the past decade, my husband and I have run a center for literacy difficulties caused primarily by Dyslexia and ADHD. As with many present before you today, I have been living with the consequences of the inadequacy of dyslexia awareness since I struggled to read and spell my first words. I however, am luckier than many from my generation who never heard about dyslexia until much later in their lives, if at all. My dyslexia was caught by my ophthalmologist when I was in fifth grade, and because of this, my parents and I were better able to understand that my literacy difficulties were not related to my intelligence. Over the years, the knowledge that I have Dyslexia has allowed me to push forward and become a successful college graduate and business owner. Without a clear understanding of the cause of my struggles, it is very likely that I would have given up on my dreams. However, I believe that I would have been able to accomplish even more if I had received appropriate intervention.

With knowledge comes power, and specifically indicating that a child has Dyslexia on the IEP form will allow parents and guardians not only the opportunity to seek out the best solutions and interventions for their dyslexic child (or children) but also allow Dyslexia to come out of the void of misunderstanding and into the light of recognition as an understandable and identifiable neurological profile.

Although there is still much work to be done beyond simply adding Dyslexia to the IEP form, the passing of this bill, with some changes, such as referring to dyslexia as Developmental Dyslexia in line its medical diagnostic terminology, will herald in a new era of education in Connecticut where parents of dyslexic children will no longer have the all to face the blank, fearful, and confused stares of educators at PPT meetings. Instead, parents and educators will be able to converse together using the same terminology, language, understanding of a child's literacy difficulties.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Susan Fredette
50 West Branch Drive, Hebron, CT 06033
860-228-3422, susanfredette@yahoo.com

3/17/14

Representative Fleischmann, Representative Stillman, Senator Linares, and members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Raised House Bill No. 5562, An Act Concerning Special Education.

I am the parent of a Dyslexic residing in Haddam and am concerned with the lack of training and resources necessary to identify and remediate Dyslexia in our young school children. I am a parent of a Dyslexic. Years ago, I did not want to accept this. I thought that Dyslexia meant that there was an inability to learn. Through much turmoil and research I now understand that Dyslexia is real and it affects 20% of our nation's population. Dyslexics are extremely smart and can be taught to read, and are most successful when afforded certain accommodations that level the playing field. This syndrome is almost 4 times more prevalent than Autism, yet the individuals who are trusted to identify this in our children do not recognize the signs, have difficulty identifying appropriate interventions and fail to understand their obligation under the Child Find law to pursue a Comprehensive Reading Evaluation. My daughter had many, many of the warning signs.

It sounds relatively benign when you're told that your child isn't learning to read... the first year. "No big deal", you're told, "they'll get it". The second year, your child gets more of the same instruction, just in a smaller group and it is now that you begin to see the child you knew start to slip away. Before you know it, your child is feeling worthless and you have no idea what to do or how to help. As a parent you are alone, with no support and no training watching your child sink further and further into anxiety, self doubt, self-loathing, and despair. There are no words to adequately express to you the level of fear, anxiety and pain you feel at watching your child endure this horror day after day in school! After all... they are failing at the very first thing that they were ever asked to do in school, which is to learn to read, and the adults are acting as if they should already know how to do it. Ask any parent of a second grade Dyslexic what their household looks and sounds like in the evenings and they will most likely tell you Armageddon!

It is unconscionable to me that we continue to allow these children to be placed under such duress and turmoil simply because of a lack of training. Our children have the right to be equally afforded the opportunity to be appropriately identified and have their educational needs met as any other child in our schools.

The emotional scars from this kind of turmoil in a child's early life run deep and they rewrite on the canvas of who that child was meant to be forever changing it. I will never truly know the extent of my daughter's scars but I know now that because my daughter is Dyslexic she will find her own path and even better solutions to her problems and she will become an even better version of herself. She only needed to be given wings and, by being explicitly taught, a chance to learn to fly.

I know, through research, that my future grandchildren have a higher chance of struggling with Dyslexia and it is for them that I sit here before you today. I cannot bear the thought of, years from now, going through with my grandchildren what I went through with my daughter and knowing that we had the chance today and sat on the sidelines and didn't do everything that we could to make a difference in their lives.

Please join me in standing up for Dyslexics in all of our lives and future Dyslexics to come by supporting Raised House Bill No. 5562, An Act Concerning Special Education.

Thank you for allowing me to share my experiences.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Cynthia Bankoski

Testimony: Dyslexia Legislation

Angela Hickmann
Westport, CT

Mom of Dyslexic Third Grade Son

CT State Certified Reading Consultant; Veteran Public School Teacher

My statements do not reflect the opinions of any District. These are my personal and professional experiences. Please enact mandates for teachers to implement instructional methodology already outlined in our Guidelines. Without legal mandates, appropriate instruction will not be provided.

H.B. 5562

CT Guidelines for Identifying Children with Disabilities 2010 stipulate "A student whose primary need is in the area of word decoding should have research-based interventions and progress monitoring assessments focused on decoding skills, not comprehension....intensive, systematic teaching of phonics integrated with phonemic awareness instruction is especially critical."

My son's data conclusively confirmed a "critical" need for decoding instruction. His school data confirmed his Reading achievement levels are significantly discrepant by several grade levels below his chronological age. He needed a decoding program exclusively, however, this is not what he received.

Rather, my son's Reading program aligned with *Whole Language* instructional methodology. *Whole Language* has been aggressively advocated by District leadership and educators. *Whole Language* is the methodology The National Reading Panel, The International Dyslexia Association, No Child Left Behind Laws, and Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act sought to eradicate.

My son will begin Fourth Grade at a First Grade decoding level if I do not provide him with intensive instruction that his school failed to provide. I live in a town with ample resources, yet dyslexia fails to be remediated appropriately. I can only imagine how dire the situation is for other children around the State of CT.

CT has already stipulated what works to remediate dyslexia. However, our teachers are not provided professional development to follow these guidelines. **CT needs legislation to mandate implementation of these guidelines specific to dyslexia.** Absent legal mandates, administrators will not require teachers to implement the best practices in dyslexia remediation as stipulated in this document. And these best practices can be implemented with existing materials with **no cost to Districts**. It's simply following a predetermined instructional sequence with a multi-sensory routine.

PPT meetings are grueling negotiations over services as if we are negotiating the sale of a car. Last Friday, I recorded our 2-hour PPT meeting. You are welcome to hear the intense debates that result in the District's repeated denials of appropriate instruction for dyslexic children because they are not "required" to. I encourage you to listen to this meeting. You may contact me directly to hear some or all of what parents are subjected to in order to secure an appropriate education for their children: ahickmann9@gmail.com

This was our fifth and our final PPT meeting. I have no choice but to revoke my consent for Special Education services and seek remediation on my own.

My name is Dawn McNary. I am the parent of a 4th Grader in East Haddam CT and a returning resident to the state of CT.

I am submitting testimony today in support of RHB5562, Section 1, An Act Concerning Special Education. It is imperative that SLD-Dyslexia be recognized in the state of CT public school system. We can only expect our children to be properly identified and receive subsequent interventions once there is a recognition of the SLD-Dyslexia. However, in order to identify, intervene and recognize Dyslexia as a learning disability we must first start with education of our educators. Early intervention, in General Ed, is key to providing the tools our children need to be highly successful, confident members of their schools now and society down the road.

As a prior CT resident who has spent many of the last 20 years in Texas I have had the pleasure of having children educated in both CT and Texas over the years. It was in a town in Texas, Forney- about 20 miles East of Dallas, that I had the good fortune to run into a school district that was so far advanced in Dyslexia/Dysgraphia Identification and interventions that it is hard to accept anything less. The definition of Dyslexia and the process for identification dates back to the late 1990s in Texas. The education of educators has been going on for more than a decade now and the results are measurable. The definition of Dyslexia we worked under in my prior district were as follows :

As defined in TEC §38.003:

1. "Dyslexia" means a disorder of constitutional origin manifested by a difficulty in learning to read, write, or spell, despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence, and sociocultural opportunity.
2. "Related disorders" includes disorders similar to or related to dyslexia such as developmental auditory imperceptions, dysphasia, specific developmental dyslexia, developmental dysgraphia, and developmental spelling disability.

The identification of difficulties was made by the classroom teacher. In our experience this was done as early as Spring of Grade 1. Yes Grade 1! The training for identification is not just for the Dyslexia specialist within the district, but rather for all classroom teachers. The goal being to look for and recognize key components that 'may' indicate a possible determination of Dyslexia as the cause. The goal being simple: get the teachers who are on the front lines day in and day out with the students to bring concerns relating

to perceived unexpected delays in learning to the attention of the Dyslexia professional and the parents. From this point a discussion would be had about possibility of screening and a full explanation was given as to what that screening would look like, who would be involved, and what options would be available based on results. The screening would be extensive and take place over many weeks and include everything from class room work and class room teachers' evaluation to parent questionnaires and IQ testing. Once the results were compiled all involved parties would meet and a plan of action would be put in place if it was warranted and if all parties were in agreement.

The definition of Dyslexia as a Specific Learning Disability and what that affords our young students with regard to accommodations, alternate learning and such is not clear in CT. This lack of clarity is causing great frustration on the part of all parties: School officials, Parents and Students. Dyslexia does not mean a child is incapable. Dyslexia does not mean a child cannot achieve. There are many myths about dyslexia and what a child with dyslexia looks like, acts like, writes like, talks like, or reads like. Myths should not be in the hands and minds of our educators, yet they are. Only education can change this issue. Only education can change the understanding about what is Dyslexia. The bill, RHB5562, is not perfect, there is room for change- enhancement- addition. However, this bill is the first step in a process that is a decade or more late in coming and cannot wait another day to begin.

Please support RHB5562 as a first step and if you feel so inclined make additions or amendments to it that will lead to better services for the students in our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Dawn L McNary
Parent of 4th grader
East Haddam CT
860-575-5001

**Testimony Before the Education Committee in Support of Bill No. 5562,
An Act Concerning Special Education, Section 1
March 17, 2014**

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and Education Committee Members:

My name is Vanessa Vowe, and I reside in Naugatuck, Connecticut. I am the program director for Literacy Volunteers of Greater Waterbury, and I was also an adult literacy tutor for 20 years. I strongly urge your support of Bill No. 5562, Section 1, but with the addition of a universal definition of dyslexia and effective professional development for public school educators.

I work on a daily basis with adults who struggle to read their own mail, fill out medical forms, complete job applications, read a book to their children, decode signs they encounter everywhere and everyday in their communities. I name just a few of the many basic demands in life that require the ability to read and write. Can you imagine what your life would be like if you struggled with these everyday?

Unfortunately, too many adult learners in our program who exhibit signs of dyslexia were never screened for dyslexia when they were in school. Without early identification and proper interventions, we hear painful stories of adults:

- Who have endured the label of "stupid," though they are intelligent, creative individuals,
- Who keep their literacy homework locked in briefcases so that their sons and daughters will not discover that their mothers and fathers cannot read,
- Who turn down job promotions because they fear that their employers will learn that they cannot read reports,
- Who have spent a major portion of their lives in prison, without a sense of self-worth and with limited opportunities to transition to a better way of life,
- Who cry because no one understands how much they have suffered.

It is so important to point out that remediation of reading as an adult is extremely difficult. Literacy takes many hours of instruction and practice—and adults do not often have the luxury of time. Finding and keeping a job, child care, family pressures, and many other obstacles interfere with learning. Some adults may never even seek help with reading after so many failures in school—it is too humiliating for them. That is why we must insure that all children learn to read while they are in school.

So please support this bill with the noted additions. Effective help for children with dyslexia is long overdue.

Thank you.

Vanessa Vowe
Naugatuck, Connecticut



Kelly Howard
Before the
Education Committee
Regarding:

R.H.B 5562 Section 1 An Act Concerning Special Education

March 13, 2014

Good Afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and other members of the Education Committee. My name is Kelly Howard, mother of Zoey and Katie Howard. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today on the proposed bill listed above.

My daughter, Zoey, is a 6 year old Fraternal Twin. She is currently in first grade, attending Bakerville Consolidated Elementary School in New Hartford, Connecticut. She was recently diagnosed with Language Based Learning Disability/Dyslexia and Expressive Language Disorder.

The first signs of learning difficulties arose in preschool, during the year-end assessment. Zoey had great difficulty retaining the alphabet and names of shapes. The Director of the program was very concerned about the results this was in June 2013.

The following September, Zoey began a half day kindergarten program at Bakerville Consolidated Elementary School. She was in the same class as her sister Katie. Part of their program was a requirement to memorize 25 high frequency words. Katie learned the words with relative ease. Zoey struggled. Neither my husband nor I knew what was wrong. We tried everything. Zoey could remember some of the words Monday and then forget them by Wednesday. At first we thought she was just being lazy and we would get upset. We would tell her let's just keep practicing. We had no idea what she was going through. We told her when she could get all the words memorized; we would take her to NY City to buy an American Girl Doll. We were desperate and would have done anything to encourage her to learn these words.

In November at the time of a Parent Teacher conference we learned something was wrong. I remember going into that conference so happy thinking I was going to be told how smart my girls were. Instead the teacher looked at my husband and I and said, "Do you want the good news or the bad news?" Foolishly we took the good news first. Katie was learning well towards the high end of the class. As for Zoey, her teacher said, "I do not know what is going on!"

It was like an out-of-body experience for me as Zoey's teacher walked us through the work she had been doing with my daughter, explaining to us what she was experiencing. Here we have one child doing so well while the other struggles. The teacher told us a story about a 'circle time experience' in which she called on the kids to answer various questions. Being selected is a real honor and the kids clamor to be picked. In this instance, the teacher picked Zoey but Zoey could not answer the question. The other kids were all yelling, "I know it, I know it, pick me."

Katie got so upset she started yelling, "Zoey, you know this, I know you know this, just answer the question!"

I could feel the pain and embarrassment my little girl must have felt. It went on and on. The last story the teacher told us was about an independent timed test she had given the class. They were to write down a few of the so called 'popcorn' words in a simple sentence and draw a picture. She told us Zoey froze - she was confused and didn't know what to do. She looked around at her friends hoping to see what was on their paper. The teacher said she could see Zoey struggling but it was meant to be an independent assignment. She knew it was uncomfortable for Zoey but she could not do anything. All I could think was how awful my poor little girl must have felt. I wished I could have been there with her. I kept picturing her little face looking for me.

After the conference, I went and sat in my car and cried. One by one I felt like my hopes and dreams were being shattered. I felt like someone had punched me in the stomach. All my friends were telling me how proud they were of their children, how great they did on their progress reports. Poor Katie; I could not even celebrate her achievement the way I should have. I was too numb and consumed with heartache and worry for Zoey. I regret that now.

My husband and I work long hours and by the time we get home at night, the girls just want to play with us. They would only see us a few hours before bed time so the last thing they wanted us doing was forcing more work on them - after all, this was Kindergarten. That night I reached out to a friend Colleen who has a business called, Little Hands Big Ideas, which teaches children sign language and intensive reading. She charges \$100 an hour which wasn't in our budget, but we were desperate and were willing to do whatever was necessary. We hired her to work with Zoey in the morning before Kindergarten, and then she would drop her off at school.

In addition to the extra help Zoey was getting at school with the paraprofessional and her Teacher, she worked with Colleen through the end of the school year. At this point, Zoey told us she didn't like school anymore and did not want to go back. She just wanted to go to camp. It must have been hard for her. My husband also told me a story that was like a knife in my heart. He took one morning off so he could take Zoey for her tutoring session. He said Zoey was so excited in the morning; she put on her usual big puffy fairy/princess party dress and a fancy headband with a big bow. Tim said when he pulled up to Colleen's house; he looked in the review mirror at Zoey. He saw Zoey look out at Colleen's house, realizing where she was, she let out a deep sigh (out of frustration) and then lowered her head. He said it was the saddest thing he'd ever seen. Then she slowly took off her pretty headband, paused for a moment then reached her little hand out to him and handed him the headband, and said, "I don't feel like wearing this anymore." Then with a lowered head and a sad face she went into Colleen's house. Tim knew Zoey liked the tutor; it wasn't her that was the problem. It was that Zoey had such difficulty learning to spell that the strong negative connotation that went along with facing the task, was overwhelming and creating a feeling of hopelessness for her. It was at this point in time that Zoey would ask me, Mommy am I stupid? Mommy why don't I learn like Katie? I would tell her, Zoey everyone learns differently. Do not worry how other people are learning. We will find the way you learn best. She kept asking me the same question and I would give her the same answer. Then I started to tell her that I learned the same way as her, she said you did? I said yes. I told her how my sister learned everything so fast. This helped her a little.

Then one day my regular babysitter cancelled and another local girl, Kay, watched the kids. Kay is homeschooled and is in high school. She had been reading with the girls and working on the site words. When I got home, I asked how they did. I mentioned that Zoey was having difficulty catching on with the site words. She said to me, "Kelly do you think Zoey has Dyslexia?" I said, "what?" As I recalled Dyslexia that was turning the words or letters around, right? I tried to think if Zoey did that. My immediate reaction was - no I do not think so. Kay could see I was contemplating what she said to me.

"The only reason I am telling you this is because I have Dyslexia. That is why I am home schooled," she said. She added that she noticed that Zoey does some of the same exact things she used to do. She recommended I read a book, *Dyslexia the Gift*.

I started to do research on this to get a better understanding. I could see similarities in the symptoms the teacher was seeing and what I was reading. In the meantime, we had another meeting with Zoey's teacher. I mentioned the possibility of Dyslexia; it was like I said a dirty four-letter word. She clearly got uncomfortable talking about it. So I didn't press it. She said that she felt we should have Zoey tested for a learning disability, to find out exactly what is wrong so we would know the best way to teach her. She indicated that we would have to make a written request for the testing to be performed. During the time she spoke with us, it seemed as though she was being very guarded and couldn't just come out and tell us what she thought. At this point if there was a definition of Dyslexia on the books and awareness amongst teachers, maybe we could have had a candid conversation. I know a teacher cannot make a diagnosis but they should be able to tell parents what they are seeing without fear of losing their jobs. That is why it is important that this bill include more substantive language that includes a definition of dyslexia and training for teachers.

We requested an evaluation for Zoey, it was performed by Meagan Brown the School Psychologist, Don Tobias Speech/Lang, Mrs. Baillargeon her Special Education Teacher. Before we started the testing I told them I had a concern about Dyslexia. Again they all gave me the same reaction, as they exchanged glances amongst themselves. I felt like, what am I missing here? It was very weird. I told them my younger brother had Dyslexia, though I didn't know much about it. They noted my concern and scheduled their testing. When the results came back we had another meeting.

At that meeting, I realized that Zoey would be labeled as Special Education to get the help and services she needed. I knew it was the right thing to do, but I got so choked up as I fought back tears it hit me - my child is going to need special education. Her teacher reached out to me and said it's OK; you're doing the right thing. They told me I had to sign a form and that they would create an Independent Education Plan (IEP) for Zoey. Again, all of this was very unfamiliar to me. I signed the form which included a list of 2 PPT Recommendations. The first sentence was the first step in facing reality. It said that Zoey qualifies for special education services as a student with a Learning Disability. And so the journey for Zoey, her sister and her parents began.



We were at the end of Kindergarten and of course, the next step was first grade. We knew in our hearts that we should put the girls in separate classes. Zoey was so scared of school, she was clinging to Katie. We felt keeping them in the same class would hold Katie back and not be helpful to Zoey. It was difficult but we did it. Zoey was so upset about it. She came home from school and said, "Mommy did you tell them to split us up? Now I am afraid that Katie and I will never be together again." I looked at her sad little face, she was so upset, and I just couldn't tell her the truth. She'd never understand. I said no, Zoey, the school separated you. At 5 years old, I felt it was better for her to believe the

school made the decision than to try and explain how her learning disability could adversely affect her sister which she would not have understood and would likely have caused an even greater sense of hopelessness.

I spoke with my Pediatrician who has been a great help to me through this process, Doctor Robert Toscano. He told me to keep very detailed records and ask the school to give me weekly evaluations. He said this way we can tell if the gap is widening or closing. I also spoke to him about getting Zoey tested for Dyslexia. The school said there was not testing available before second grade for Dyslexia. He thought we should wait a little bit. He suggested continue with the tutoring over the summer.

We hired a second grade teacher to come to our house every day to work with Zoey over the summer so she could maintain the gains she had achieved in Kindergarten. It was this firsthand experience that we could see the full impact of the difficulties Zoey was going through. This teacher was good, but it was like someone was taking Zoey's hands and sticking them in fire. The teacher told us she felt so bad. She tried every trick she knew. She apologized to us saying, I was hoping to have some type of breakthrough." She didn't cash the last week's check we gave her because she felt she had failed. It was at this point that we knew it was a much more serious problem that we had thought. I called my pediatrician and asked him to recommend a good Doctor to do a Neuropsychological Evaluation. He recommended Dr. Isenberg at Connecticut Pediatric Neuropsychology Associates. This was in July 2013; the first appointment we could get with Dr. Isenberg was January 8, 2014.

We just had the evaluation and received the report. We also paid for an extra consultation between Dr. Isenberg and our PPT Team to discuss the results of the report. Dr. Isenberg made a lot of valuable recommendations. We are now trying to get those recommendations incorporated into Zoey's IEP. It should not be so difficult to implement these recommendations. But it is and that is the struggle we are going through at this very moment. Please consider adding language to this bill to ensure students get the instruction they need in order to become proficient readers.

Before I close I would like to emphasize how much out of pocket money we have spent to get the right help for Zoey and we are still not there. Insurance has not covered any of this. Fortunately we were able to do this on our own. Many



families may not have the resources to have their child tested as testing is not covered by major health insurance and due to expense may not be able to afford tutoring. Consequently, the child will struggle, possibly fail and not receive the proper training needed to succeed. No child deserves this. This keeps me up at night. We have valuable resources right here in Connecticut at the Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity, Haskins Lab, and Literacy How. The research has already been done for us. Let's give the schools and teachers the tools they need to define and understand Dyslexia, provide approved testing and evaluations, and give educators the right tools and training to work with and to provide

special curriculum designed for Dyslexic students.

The State Legislation has the power to define the Dyslexia, bring it front and center in the educational system and provide Dyslexic children with the education they so richly deserve. This bill is a good start! I will end here and thank you for your time. Please help these children to prosper, they do not want to fail and they have so much potential!

Sincerely yours,

Tim, Kelly, Zoey and Katie Howard

Oral Testimony

I am here today as a parent of an 8 year old daughter, Isabelle, who is severely dyslexic. We knew something was not quite right early on and placed her in the town preschool assuming she would get early intervention. It has been nothing but an uphill battle since. Our family has gone to hell and back trying to get help for our daughter. Even though she could not read, write or do math we were consistently told she was age appropriate and was actually told by the head of special education that writing is not taught in the public schools. If you are sick you go to a Dr. If you need your taxes done you go to an accountant. If you suspect a learning disability, you go to the professionals in the school system. We have only been given denial and delays and now have a third grader who reads on a prekindergarten level, but that is age appropriate. H05562

This state has an SRBI program which is supposed to be utilized for intervention and if no progress made, changes made every 6 to 8 weeks. Our daughter was placed in Tier 3 intervention and left there with no improvement for over 20 weeks. We had to retain an attorney going into second grade because our child was so far behind her peers. When we got the attorney her services tripled. We sought outside evaluations which revealed numerous learning disabilities and that our child is severely dyslexic. Because the process took so long and no real action was taken by the school district our once happy and sweet child has become very angry. She hates school and anything to do with it. She has psychosomatic symptoms to try and get out of class and has become a frequent flier at the nurses office.

As legislators you may assume the schools are doing what they are supposed to be doing and ensure our children are taken care of...the whole child. I am here to tell you they are not. I am not naïve and understand there is an expense involved, but if you do not front load the problem you are creating a much more expensive burden on society in the long run. 30% of dyslexics are our great entrepreneurs and 48% of them make up our inmate population. This legislation will not help our child, but it can help another. While going through this process we could not help wonder what happens to the kids whose parents are uneducated, believe the school system, cannot take off the time from work to go to the meetings held at the times convenient for the school, or have the funds to hire an advocate or attorney to battle a system with a bottomless wallet????? I strongly encourage you to support this legislation and include a definition of, early screening for and professional development and awareness about this disability.

Jessica Thiesen

Thank you Co-Chairs and Education Committee Members for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Allison Quirion, I am the parent of a 10-year-old dyslexic son and the Founder of Decoding Dyslexia-CT a parent driven grassroots movement. I support Bill No. 5562, Section 1 and respectfully requests you revise this Section by adding language for professional development and a definition of dyslexia.

I thank the Committee for drafting Section 1 of HB 5562. I believe that this change to the IEP form will provide a benefit to those students already identified and in the process of being referred for special education services. However, the crux of the problem lies with those students who are NOT being identified and this legislation does NOT address this issue.

The State of Connecticut needs to join the other 26 states that have pending or current legislation that support dyslexic students and teachers.

From my personal experience and the experience of many of our members, there is a lack of dyslexia awareness in our public schools. Our children are going unidentified or receiving identification after years of failure within the system.

My son Jack entered Kindergarten eager to learn. These feelings changed as he had difficulties learning his letters and letter sounds. As kindergarten ended I was told that Jack was "consistently inconsistent" and they weren't sure why. First grade came with more stress and anxiety. Reading groups and reading aloud. Tears were a part of our nightly routine. Still receiving the same message that Jack was "consistently inconsistent." Second grade was his breaking point. His compensatory skills were running out. He was anxious, nervous and didn't want to go to school! Jack's 2nd grade teacher confirmed my feelings that something more was going on, but didn't know what.

Due to the lack of resources, knowledge and early identification, Jack entered 3rd grade reading below a first grade level, 3 years behind his peers!

Without dyslexia awareness our students are suffering on a daily basis from anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and behavior issues.

We NEED:

1. A universal definition, with clear inclusionary and exclusionary characteristics. This will provide an understanding of dyslexia, facilitate communication and lead to a more rapid provision of interventions.
2. We need our teachers to be provided with **professional development** with proven and effective measures so they can successfully identify and support our dyslexic students.

Governor Molloy indicated at a press conference several weeks ago that he wants our teachers to be successful and that Connecticut voices are heard. I ask the Education Committee if you will support those statements. Will you provide our teachers the resources and the knowledge about dyslexia so they can be successful? Will our voices be heard? .

Thank you for your time and commitment.

Allison Quirion
Parent
Founding Member of Decoding Dyslexia-CT

MARC HOFFMAN

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March 13th, 2014

Co-Chairs Rep. Fleischman and Senator Stillman and members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to testify today. I am here to support HRB 5562 Section 1, with modifications to include a definition of dyslexia to support an understanding and professional development specific to dyslexia awareness. I am pleased to be with you to consider the urgency for change regarding the issue of dyslexia in Connecticut Public Schools. My name is Marc Hoffman, and I am the owner of Hoffman Education and Marc Hoffman Educational Consulting. I serve as Board Chair of Eye to Eye, the only national mentoring movement that pairs kids who have learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (LD / ADHD) with college and high school mentors who have been similarly labeled. I'm a Learning Disability Advocate and dyslexic. My experiences with dyslexia have led me to the work I do today. I wake up every day with the goal of helping ensure that all children receive an appropriate education.

There's a crisis in American Schools. Research shows that only around 33% of children in school with reading disabilities are getting remediation to help them become, at the very least, functional readers. While the occurrence of dyslexia in the overall population is about 20%, the prevalence of dyslexia in prisons is more than twice that, or 48% according to a scientific study that took place in 2000. Many of these incarcerated men are great entrepreneurs but they are starting the wrong kind of businesses.

We are fortunate to have leaders in our state who appreciate both the urgency for change and the magnitude of the change that must occur to help dyslexic students. Parents, Advocates, Students, Teachers and Educators continue to champion the need for dyslexia awareness. The current provision in the proposed bill providing a box on the IEP form for "SLD-Dyslexia" is a step in the right direction but not enough. Unfortunately, there are too many children not being identified as dyslexic in schools, and the current proposed bill only helps those students already evaluated and in the process of being referred to special education services. The paramount need is that the legislation addresses the lack of awareness on the part of some schools. Many misperceptions exist such as Dyslexia being a site issue when in reality it interferes with the acquisition and processing of language. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition, and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These problems normally result from a deficit in the phonological component of language.

The dyslexia movement's interest is not to label children but to ensure that all educators have at least a basic understanding of dyslexia. For starters, this is required on the part of teachers because they are the ones directly dealing with children and they need to know the characteristics, symptoms, of dyslexia. Empirical evidence demonstrates that dyslexia is a physiological reality and not simply developmental. The treatment approach used in some CT schools is not addressing the phonemic awareness issue.

Even though dyslexia is a disability that is recognized and is covered under provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, I still see too many children dealing with educational trauma because they are misunderstood. In many cases they are not given the resources to remediate their challenges with reading. By definition, to be dyslexic, you have to have at least average intelligence. With that in mind, many children with dyslexia are brilliant but being marginalized and not given the chance to reach their potential. We are losing the next Steven Spielberg, Charles Schwab, Will Smith and even the next Albert Einstein, all Dyslexics, because no matter how smart they are, in many cases, when children constantly experience academic failure because their learning environment does not understand their cognitive profiles, they stop trying. Society needs people that think differently and tackle problems in a creative way, characteristics of many dyslexics.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to speak with you. I welcome any questions or comments that you may have

Respectfully,


Marc Hoffman, M.S.

3.16.14

Hola!

mi nombre es Alice Duos
Soy progenitora de Ariana M. Cruz
quien cursa el segundo grado. El
propósito de esta carta es explicar
como el programa de maestros
bilingues a ayudado a mi pequeña
hija y a tantos otros niños latinos
a integrarse a la Sociedad ~~de~~
(CT) bilingue. Hacen apenas 9 meses
que llegamos a la ciudad de CT
con expectativas bien altas de
encontrar trabajo, una mejor educa-
cion para mis hijos. Mis hijos
llegaron ansiosos x aprender pero
cuando empezaron las clases en
ese momento las expectativas se
convierten en frustraciones ya
que para mis hijos ha sido un
poco dificil aprender el idioma
mis hijos bienen con un ingles
basico aprendido en las escuelas
de P.R. en donde muchas veces
el maestro no esta x enseñar
Solo x cobrar un cheque y nada mas.

les confiezo que mis temores se convirtieron en realidades el ver como mis hijos ponian todo de su parte para aprender y cada dia era como una pared de ladrillo a la cual no puedes saltar pues con el tiempo se ponía cada vez mas alta. Vi como mi hijo de 14 años muchas veces lloraba x la frustración les confiezo muchas veces deee volver a P.R. pero aqui estoy luchando con mis hijos y les confiezo a nueve meses de estar aqui veo los frutos mas en mi hija de 7 años para ella a sido mas facil ya que su maestro es bilingue y a dedicado todo su esfuerzo en ayudar que para ellos sea mas facil el camino a la enseñanza del idioma. Lo contrario de mi hijo de 14 años el solo tiene una persona que le ayuda en un tiempo en su salón de clase. En las materias donde no esta

3.16.14

el traductor o ayudante se siente perdido pues entiende parte de la clase y parte no, debido a eso se a tenido que quedar tiempo extra en la escuela para sus trabajos. En una ocasion me reuni con la directora y maestros de mi hijo para hacerles saber mis frustracion y la importancia de que todos los maestros aprendan lo basico del español para que puedan ayudar mejor a nuestros niños.

Entiendo que si como requisito tambien le pidieran al maestro en general saber lo basico del español seria mas facil para nuestros hijo hispanos poder integrarse mejor. Tambien le agradezco x el excelente grupo de maestros bilingues como el sr Lopez y ms Reyes que son maestros que dan el ciento x uno para nuestros hijos, son maestros que se propusieron enseñar y hacer que la enseñanza sea mas facil para estos niños hispanos. Ahora mi preocupacion es para el siguiente año escolar

¿tendrás mis hijos la misma ayuda
bilingüe o estarán solos?

Atentamente
Alice Ducro

Agradecida
del esfuerzo
que tiene algunos
maestros en
enseñar.

Testimony for Public Hearing
Education Committee
March 17, 2014

Karima A. Robinson
Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven

RHB 5562, Section 1, An Act Concerning Special Education

Good Afternoon Representative Fleischmann, Senator Stillman, and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Karima A. Robinson. I am a tutor for Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven. I am also an independent scholar, educator, advocate, and theatre artist. I have over ten years of teaching experience at the college level. And I am a dyslexic adult. I am proof that children do not grow-out-of dyslexia. We learn to compensate and struggle to create productive lives for ourselves.

I am here today to ask you to modify the RHB 5562, Section 1, An Act Concerning Special Education in three ways. Under the federal education law IDEA, dyslexia is listed under the category of a Specific Learning Disability (SLD). I am here today to request an Individual Education Program (IEP) form for SLD-Dyslexia. I am also here to request the adoption of a universal definition of dyslexia, which will facilitate an understanding of dyslexia and lead to more rapid interventions. And finally, I am here to request training and professional development for teachers and educators at all levels on how to identify dyslexia and educate children who have it.

Students can and should be identified in the early elementary school years. The earlier a student is identified and treated for dyslexia, the easier it is to correct this condition. As the student matures, she finds ways to compensate or avoid situations where her symptoms are exposed. Her dyslexia is then compounded by the many "tricks" that she learns to cover or mask her symptoms. This makes the educator's task of correcting dyslexia more challenging. I am requesting that the bill be modified to acknowledge that dyslexia falls under the category of a Specific Learning Disability (SLD).

I am also asking that a universal definition of dyslexia be adopted. This is needed because dyslexia manifests in a variety of ways. The attributes go beyond reading to include difficulties with: spelling, math, handwriting, ADD, ADHD, memory, coordination, balance,

motor skills, timing and rhythm (sensing how many seconds, minutes or hours have passed), and the brain's compass function (knowing which way is right vs. left, east vs. west, etc). Each individual will have a different grouping and severity of symptoms. There are also different theories about the root causes of dyslexia and how to treat it. Some specialists believe that it is an inner-ear problem, while others blame our unique visual-thinking abilities that make us extremely creative. In spite of the complexity of dyslexia and its many variations, a universal definition would facilitate understanding and lead to more rapid interventions. There are many books on the subject and the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity is an excellent resource that is unique to Connecticut. Partnering with an institution like this one would facilitate the creation of a universal definition of dyslexia and support a comprehensive understanding of it in our public school system.

Lastly, I am here to advocate for training and professional development for teachers and educators on how to identify and educate children who have dyslexia. This is a widespread problem. According to the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity: 1 in 5, or 20% of the population is dyslexic. Children who have dyslexia become dyslexic adults with varying levels of literacy. In New Haven county alone, 30% of the adult population are at the lowest level of literacy. At Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven, we tutor adults who have fallen through the cracks of the public school system. Last year Literacy Volunteers tutored over 1,200 adults in basic literary skills. Adults from 18-75 years of age enter our program reading at levels between kindergarten to eighth grade. Most students we serve are functioning at the lower end of the spectrum, from kindergarten to fourth grade levels. Because I have dyslexia, I notice that most of the students we serve also have dyslexia. I recognize the signs from my experiences in elementary school. I recommend that this bill provide training and awareness for teachers and educators in order for them to also recognize the characteristics of dyslexia.

My students have difficulty concentrating and often do not comprehend what they have read. They read slowly, struggling with each word. The reading process is tiring and unpleasant for them. Two of my students are in their 60s. They are reading at a second grade level. They struggle to fill out the forms needed to receive medical treatment, apply for a driver's license, and receive their social security benefits. They often say that "they forgot their glasses at home" as an excuse not to fill out the form, and as means of getting others to complete this paperwork for them. I sadly watch them make the same "mistakes" that I made when I was elementary

school. They transpose letters, numbers, and words around on the page as they read aloud or write.

Even though I am at a much higher reading level, I identify with my students. I remain terribly frustrated by my disability. I am a slow reader, especially of technical and academic writing. Reading, writing, and math are tiring and difficult experiences for me too. I am not sure how or why I was able to compensate for my dyslexic symptoms and achieve a reasonable reading level, while my students were not. And I am at a loss as to how to correct it in others and myself.

Today spelling, grammar, math, and reading are still huge problems in my life. I am always in need of spell check, grammar check, copyeditors, calculators, and audio books. Even with modern technology, I still make "mistakes" that computers cannot catch. (For example: typing *here* when I mean *hear*, or *sacred* when I mean *scared*.) I have to read most academic or technical writing three to six times to understand its meaning. My frustration has led me to seek new methods for treating dyslexic adults.

I tell you my story, not to win your sympathy, but rather to convince you to modify this bill to ensure that those less fortunate than me, the children whose condition is so severe that they are not able to mask it, can receive the treatment and compassion that they need to succeed.

The mission of Literacy Volunteers is to eradicate illiteracy in the adult population. The modifications that I am asking you to consider will go a long way in achieving this goal. If we can identify and correct this issue in children, we can drastically reduce the illiteracy rate among future adults. Improving reading comprehension, writing, and math skills in children will reduce high-school drop out rates. It will also reduce crime rates and the numbers of people living at or below the poverty line. Literate adults acquire better jobs and are better employees. They keep their families healthy. They make greater contributions to their communities.

The inclusion of dyslexia on the Individual Education Program (IEP) form, without a definition of dyslexia does not provide the knowledge parents, teachers, and evaluators need to check that box. Parents, teachers, and educators need a clear universal definition of dyslexia to make this determination. I ask you to consider training and professional development for teachers and educators at all levels.

The people that I tutor are wonderful people. They have big hearts and great ideas. They are creative thinkers who want to live independent lives and make greater contributions to

society. The lack of awareness of dyslexia in our education system essentially excludes them from endless opportunities. They should not be inadvertently punished by society because their brains work differently. They naturally think "outside of the box." They are the kind of people that Google is looking to hire. Let's create a future where children with dyslexia can learn to correct their symptoms before they become major stumbling blocks in their development. The additions I am asking you to implement will ensure that these children can contribute their unique perspective to society.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Karima A. Robinson

March 14, 2014

To the members of the Education Committee,

I am here today to speak in support of HRB 5562 Section 1. My name is Louise Spear-Swerling, and I am a researcher and teacher educator at SCSU who has helped prepare both general and special educators to teach reading for many years. I have been involved in the development of numerous state education policies, including writing of the state's current guidelines for identification of specific learning disabilities (SLD). My colleagues and I have studied teachers' knowledge base about reading for over a decade (e.g., Spear-Swerling, 2013; Spear-Swerling & Brucker, 2004; Spear-Swerling, Brucker, & Alfano, 2005; Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2012), and I consult widely in Connecticut schools on cases of students with dyslexia. So I have a strong sense of what Connecticut educators typically know about dyslexia, based both upon my research and my professional experience. Unfortunately, too often, what educators know about dyslexia is not much.

Dyslexia is the most common, well-researched type of SLD. In fact, current state guidelines already explicitly include dyslexia on p. 50, as a "distinct type of learning disability associated with difficulties in accurate and fluent single word decoding skills," a definition highly consistent with those used in the scientific community (e.g., Fletcher, 2009; International Dyslexia Association, 2010; Lyon, Shaywitz, & Shaywitz, 2003). The document goes on to describe appropriate identification measures for these students, as well as their need for intensive, systematic teaching of phonics. I know that these words are there – because I wrote them.

Regrettably, however, awareness of dyslexia in our public schools and colleges of education still is very limited. If children with dyslexia are lucky enough to have parents with the financial means and educational savvy to advocate for them, those children often get the help they need, though not always promptly enough to provide the best possible outcomes. But children whose parents lack financial means or educational savvy can have dyslexia too, and often those children receive the wrong kind of help – or no help at all. This lack of awareness is especially tragic because effective approaches to early identification and intervention in dyslexia are very well understood (e.g., Birsch, 2005; Denton et al., 2006, 2010; Foorman et al., 1998; International Dyslexia Association, 2010). Furthermore, many struggling readers who would not meet formal criteria for dyslexia could also benefit from these approaches.

Specification of dyslexia as one type of SLD on the IEP form is certainly a step in the right direction, because it could help to increase awareness of dyslexia, while still making clear that children identified with dyslexia must meet SLD criteria, something I believe is vitally important. However, another critical step involves professional development for educators, so that they have an accurate understanding of dyslexia, as well as of evidence-based identification and intervention practices, when they consider checking that box on the IEP. Most educators truly want to help children, and they are eager for this information. I urge you to provide for this kind of research-based professional development.

Thank you for your recognition of these important issues and your willingness to act on the behalf of Connecticut's teachers and schoolchildren.

Best regards,

Louise Spear-Swerling, Ph.D.
 Professor
 Department of Special Education & Reading
 Southern Connecticut State University
 501 Crescent St.
 New Haven CT 06515

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Beth M. Missios

From: Keith dawley [kadawley@att.net]
Sent: Thursday, March 13, 2014 10:25 PM
To: Beth M. Missios
Subject: attn: Keith

State Senator Osten, Representatives, Co-Sponsors and supporters of dyslexia legislation, thank you for the opportunity to address HRB No. 5562.

Change is needed in Connecticut. I am fortunate that my first two children, age 17 and 11, learn and succeed naturally in our public school system. They are able to endure their school years as they grow with their peers and learn to their full potential. Fortunate because they made it obvious to see my third child, age 8, grade three, despite his high IQ and tremendous work ethic, falling behind and not receiving the support that he requires to learn to read. He hit a wall, as dyslexics do, 2 years ago in reading and has not made progress since despite his 3 years and running in a tier 3 severe decoding intervention program administered by a paraprofessional who is overseen by a reading consultant. Our school systems are designed to teach children to learn to read from kindergarten thru third grade, and then read to learn. Dyslexic kids are not ready to move on past third grade, or from when they hit their wall, because they never learned to read therefore hitting a language barrier. It is unfair to these kids, to ask them to get up and give their best everyday and expect the impossible from them, to succeed with out being taught to read in a way that they can learn.

My personal experience with our town school system in Montville has been a long and grueling one. I have learned if the parent does not persistently push and know what to ask for, a dyslexic child will not be recognized. It has been a year since I demanded the initial testing, more testing last November, and finally an independent elevation diagnosing my son with a broad term of reading disorder. And lets allow these kids the gratification of what their disorder is, Dyslexia. A year and a half it has been, 5 PPT's, hours of testing, a diagnosis and next comes working with the school to administer a program that will help my son. All that time has past to get him to this point and still not receiving instruction which will help him yet. When I sit in on my sons decoding reading group, knowing what I know now, I can't help but feel remorse for the other kids that maybe dyslexic and never be recognized. It must be as equally frustrating for our teachers in this state to teach the children who display characteristics of dyslexia. To have their "hands tied" and not have a proven reading instruction program or training. I do not know the dollar amount is costs the state to give a child an education for 13 years but we all know in this room that reading is the ground level base of an education. Lets give our children an the early identification and proven reading instruction that will allow them to succeed.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. Amanda Dawley

Beth M. Missios

From: Keith dawley [kadawley@att.net]
Sent: Thursday, March 13, 2014 10:15 PM
To: Beth M. Missios
Subject: attn: Keith

Thank you to our Education Committee for drafting the dyslexia legislation and for giving me the chance to speak here today. I support the HRB 5562. My mom wrote that part.

I am Nicholas Dawley, age 8, recently diagnosed with a reading disability but I would rather be called dyslexic. I am in third grade at Mohegan Elementary School in Uncasville. The reading decoding program I am in is called Imagine It! It is not helping me learn to read. My teacher told my mom that I have not made progress in reading in two years. My spelling tests are hard for me and I get most of the words wrong after studying all week. I bring a lot of my classwork home to do with my homework because I can not read as fast as my friends do. I do not mind reading out loud in front of my reading work shop group of three other kids. They know what is going on and they read like me. Maybe they are dyslexic too. I never raise my hand to read in front of my regular class. Now I know why it is so hard for me to read, I am dyslexic. It is good to know why school is so hard for me.

Me and my friends in my reading work shop need your help. Reading is not getting easier for us and we work hard in the Imagine It program everyday. Please help kids like us. Thank you again.

Nicholas Dawley

Bill RHB 5562, Section 1, an Act Concerning Special Education

From Adam Glassman

Orange, Connecticut

Hi. My name is Adam Glassman. I am ten years old. I live in Orange, Connecticut. I am here to speak in support of Bill RHB 5562, to get dyslexia recognized in the State of Connecticut.

I was diagnosed in kindergarten with a reading disability, after my mom brought me to a doctor but it wasn't until the end of third grade, when I went back to the doctor that I found out that I was dyslexic. Reading, spelling and writing have always been hard for me. Finding out that I was dyslexic helped me understand why I had so much trouble in school. I am really good at math and science. Also, I love building with Legos and working on my Cub Scout requirements.

I started getting help by a reading teacher in the middle of kindergarten. In the middle of first grade I started to go to the resource room. The resource room is a tiny room with up to ten kids in there at a time. The kids are working on reading, writing and math. Sometimes the room is noisy and it is hard to concentrate. I always felt like my friends are reading better than me. My reading level hasn't improved enough to read the same books as my friends.

Teachers don't understand dyslexia. Teachers have called me lazy. Sometimes I work slower than my friends, when I do my school work. Even though I am really good at math teachers put me in math groups for extra help because they don't understand the way I work. I am put with kids who don't understand math at all. I have creative ways to figure out math. Even when I get the right answer teachers tell me I am doing it wrong. Writing is hard for me too. The ideas are in my head but it is hard to write them down. My teachers don't realize some of the tricks I use to keep up with my friends. I wish teachers understood the way I think.

All dyslexic kids should have the chance to get the right teaching earlier in school. Please help me and other kids like me by helping to pass Bill RHB 5562. Dyslexia needs to be recognized and teachers should have the proper training, so they can help kids like me.

March 16, 2014

Testimony re. RHB 5562, Section 1, An Act Concerning Special Education

Co-chairs, Representative Fleischmann and Senator Stillman and members of the committee, I am Liam Kells, a student in 10 grade at Fairfield College Preparatory High School, in Fairfield, CT. I am here to support HRB 5562 Section 1 with modification to include a definition of dyslexia to support understanding and professional development specific to dyslexia awareness.

My mother had me tested in second grade because no matter how much extra reading help I received I could not learn how to read. The results were that I had no serious disability. Then during that summer my parents had me retest privately (outside of the public school) and it showed that I was very dyslexic. In third grade I went into special education and received specialized reading instruction. However, in that school year I began to dramatically fall behind in reading compared to my peers. Special education was a "two step forward one step backward" process. It wasn't helping as much as it should.

I believe that I would have benefitted from an early dyslexia screening because I would have been identified as dyslexic in either Kindergarten or First Grade. Kindergarten and First grade are the best years for teaching children how to read. Why shouldn't dyslexics learn how to read in those grades too? It's not at all fair that dyslexics don't even begin to get any kind of specialized reading instruction until about third grade. While the

non-dyslexics are learning their "a, b, c's" the unfortunate dyslexics are completely confused, feeling stupid, and feeling totally inadequate for years until someone recognizes that maybe there is a learning issue, which usually doesn't happen until third grade. I think that if I was tested at a very early age and then given specialized reading instruction the story of my educational career would have been completely different. I would have been able to stay in public school and use my new reading skills to learn science, math, english, social studies, etc. without having to struggle and ultimately leave the comfort of my neighborhood school and go to a specialized school that taught me how to read.

When my mother and I discovered we both were dyslexic we went straight to the computer and searched the term "dyslexia". There we found not only what dyslexia was but what were the specialized reading instruction methods that need to be used to teach dyslexics how to read. In addition, the search resulted in identifying a lot of very successful people who were dyslexic. The term "specific learning disability" is what is used in public school when a child is identified as reading disabled. "Specific learning disability" seems more like a broad mystery and hurts more than it helps. To be labeled "specific learning disability" you do not have a clear definition on what that is and a defined way to remediate it. You also do not find anyone, successful or not, that identifies themselves as "specific learning disabled". As a result the child has no sense of hope that he or she is going to be able to learn how to read and ultimately be successful.

I strongly believe that teachers and children will benefit from teacher training in the area of dyslexia. Teachers will benefit by knowing that they are teaching ALL their students how to read. Dyslexic children will benefit because they will learn to read at the same time as their peers. With being instructed in the specialized way, dyslexic children will view themselves as equal, not "less than", everyone else in their classroom and school. Teachers could also help avoid stigmatizing situations for the dyslexic child, for example, not calling on them to read aloud in class. This would give the child hope and show that others really do care about them especially their teachers. From my personal experience I know that dyslexic children often do not feel like their teachers truly care about them or believe in them.

Thank you.

Liam Kells

Andrea Estell, Psy.D., Chairman
Union Board of Education
12 Lawson Rd. Union, CT
March 17, 2014

RE: HB 5562 An Act Concerning Special Education

Mr. Chairman and members of the Education Committee,

My name is Dr. Andrea Estell and I am the Chairman of the Town of Union Board of Education. Thank you for providing me an opportunity to support House Bill 5562, An Act Concerning Special Education.

Over a two-year period Union's special education population has increased significantly to 16 percent of its total student population. Given the number of students and the distribution of the necessary interventions it difficult, if not impossible, to qualify for Excess Cost reimbursement under the current formula despite the fact that overall expenditures have risen dramatically.

Tomorrow night we are scheduled to meet with the Board of Finance to request an additional appropriation for the current fiscal year. The additional appropriate will result in a total increase of 14.3 percent over the 2013-14 budget. The majority of the additional appropriation will pay for an unanticipated 63 percent increase special education costs. Yet, we will still not qualify for any reimbursement this under the current structure.

We will also be presenting our budget proposal for fiscal year 2014 - 15 that represents a 16 percent bottom line increase with a 22 percent increase in budgeted special education expenditures.

Under the current Excess Cost Reimbursement formula, only two of our students next year would qualify for reimbursement resulting in a 4.6 percent reduction in our budget. The proposed Three Tier Excess Cost formula would qualify the expenditures for a third student resulting in a further reduction of our budget by 1.2 percent.

I sincerely hope that this testimony will assist you in your deliberation of HB 5562. Thank you for your desire to help local public schools continue the practice of serving the needs of their students in manner that they deserve.

Respectfully,

Andrea Estell, Psy.D.,
Chairman
Union Board of Education

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is not just reading. Dyslexia is not just spelling. Dyslexia is not WHO I am, but it IS a part of me.

I love when my mom reads to me. I love to watch videos online or use Siri to read to me on the iPad. I love good stories and good books. I love to learn- just not at school, this school in CT. I like my school in CT, I like the people in my school too, but not the learning part that part is not fun because no one understands me. In Texas I had a great teacher who was teaching me how to make sense of everything. For a long time it was hard and then I met Ms Acker and we did MTA. In MTA I did reading and spelling. There were only 4 or 5 of us in the class and we went to her every single day and it was so great! I learned so much about words and how they work, some of it I remember but not all because I only went for half a year before we moved to CT. When I went back in my classroom with my friends I could read ALL the book club books and do all my tests and when we took the TAKS test I even got COMMENDED in reading. That was awesome!!!! In CT no one at school believes in Dyslexia. No one wants to work with me like Ms Acker did and I don't know why. I am smart and I have so many questions that I need answers to but when it is time to write or read I just fake it. If I fake it the teachers leave me alone. If I tell them I don't understand they always say- Yes you do- you are smart! They are not listening to me. Please help them listen to me. My mom says this letter will help you understand how important it is to have Dyslexia on my IEP so that someone will listen and someone at school will work with me- like in Texas! I want all my teachers to know the stuff Ms Acker knows she is very smart and made me know I am smart too! Thank you- Jesse Burks
4th Grade East Haddam (Nathan Hale Ray Middle School) from Forney TX (Criswell Elementary School) 860-575-5001

Jesse Burks

My name is Jack Quirion, I am 10 years old and I am dyslexic. I support the dyslexia bill no 5562, Section 1.

I found out I had dyslexia at the end of 2nd grade. There was a lot of testing. When it was over they told me that I needed reading help. When I got out of the room and I closed the door, I said to myself "I don't care if I read as fast as my brother, I don't care if I read as good as my dad".

That night when I got home my whole family sat on my bed. My mom read a book about dyslexia. She told me that I had dyslexia. She said my dyslexia makes it hard for me to learn how to read. We talked about how I WILL learn to read. We also talked about famous dyslexics like Walt Disney, Albert Einstein and Steve Jobs.

When I told my friend Nick I was dyslexic, he said, "What is that?" I told him it is a reading disability.

At school almost everyone knows I have dyslexia. It is not bad but it is annoying, because everyone asks, "What is dyslexia?" Or they say "Isn't dyslexia when you read backwards?" NO! It is your brain doing things differently.

I wish I had help earlier. I wish I knew I was dyslexic earlier. Before I knew I had dyslexia I felt very confused. I felt like crying every day because I couldn't read and my friends could. Reading was REALLY hard! Now that I know I have dyslexia, I feel like I am on top of the world and my reading is improving. I read this!

Mr. Chairman, senators, representative, and guests.

My name is Joey Davenport.

I am 15 years old and a sophomore at vinal tech.

And I'm dyslexic.

HB5562

I was diagnosed with dyslexia in 7th grade. at that time i was reading on a 3rd grade level and decoding on a kindergarten level.

I see things mechanically. ask me to read an English textbook and write a paper on it and I'll just give you a blank stare. but tell me to open the hood of a car and tear down the engine now thats easy.

Words on a page look like gibberish. they bounce around in my head and i can't always make out what they are. but when i look at an engine I can see not only what you see the outside of the engine i see the internal parts all working together gas and air flowing through the engine.

we dyslexics have a different mind, we are mechanical, artistic, creative, brilliant, and even geniuses. so I'm mechanical. i'm lucky to be in a school where my talents can shine where i can start the groundwork to become a great mechanic.

before i was diagnosed with dyslexia when i went to school i used to think it would be just another day when i wouldn't be understood when a teacher would point to a paper and say and say over and over you know this, you know this but i really didn't.

i don't like being called on to answer questions aloud in class because it takes me longer to process the answer and i feel like everyone thinks i'm an idiot.

reading out loud in class is one of my least favorite things to do. i feel like people think i'm just trying to get by. when i make mistakes, someone else shouts out the word making me feel dumb. but the truth is i knew the word i just messed up.

but without being diagnosed with dyslexia i would not have been able to get the help i needed and i wouldn't be able to read this.

since 7th grade i haven't had a summer vacation.

i've attended special classes at the dyslexia institute 3 days a week during the summer.

during the school year i attend tutoring at the dyslexia institute 2 days a week and stay after

school for extra help 2 more days most kids are in school 30 hours a week i'm in school 38 hours.

i am here today to help you understand what dyslexia is. so maybe other kids won't struggle as hard as i do, after all 1 in 5 kids are like me.

please recognize dyslexia as a learning disability. so all dyslexic kids have a real chance to succeed.

Honestly reading the stacks of papers each of you have next to you would be overwhelming to me but i ask you how many of you can rebuild an engine?

Honorable Education Committee Members:

Palms sweating, heart pounding. A focused gaze on anything but her. The one who could change my playground status from artisan to jester with just a few words HBSS62
“Kyla, it’s your turn to read” this shook my seven year old core. There was no escape route, super hero, or invisibility cloak that could save me from this moment. Knees shaking I stood up looking down at the paper that was now drenched in sweat from my palms. I tried not to make eye contact with my peers, but it didn’t stop them from staring at me. It was like they knew that once I stood up, no words would come out of my mouth. I saw no connection to how the symbols on the paper could create the words we speak. Reading out loud was painful, not just for me, but for the audience to sit through: my face as red as a tomato, sounding out every letter, and trying to make sense of what appeared to me as nonsense—to a natural reader, a sentence.

It didn’t hit me, that there was a problem until those moments in class. However, others knew that I had a problem yet had no answers to what it was. So to try and figure it out, I was taken out of class every Friday and placed in a room with a woman who would ask me the same questions and show me the same cards and make me take the same tests and still there was no answer to why I was quickly falling behind my classmates. The problem about this was no teacher told me that I was doing things wrong. When I began working with a special ed teacher daily in the first grade I would take computerized spelling tests. I would get every single word wrong. I did not know at the time because the teacher did not tell me that I would get every word wrong, this was she said to “protect my self-esteem”.

My education persisted and I began to go from school to intensive tutoring, because it was at that point where my reading and writing levels were so low that there was a chance of me staying back yet another year. I began to not care for school, my social skills decreased extensively while my acting skills improved to the level of academy award winning for the best actress at faking sick. My brother on the other hand, who is also dyslexic, went through the same experiences as me, except, turned to the "bad-boy" route making his home the principal's office.

To cut it short, it was not the school system that taught me how to read. It was my persistent mother who pushed my brother and me on learning how to read; bringing us to clinics that focused mainly on kids like us, because the school system didn't know how to do it. Thanks to the intensive support I received outside of school I was one of the lucky ones; there was a point in time when college didn't seem like an option, the goal was to just get through school.

However, with time, I went from the lowest level classes to landing butt first in an AP English class excelling greatly in writing and reading. I am graduating with the class of 2014 and am proud to say that I am in fact going to college on an scholarship. Thank you to all the tutors I had a chance of working with over the years.

Kyla Daley

Student

hello my name is Tessa Lafante,
and i have dyslexia, when my mom
asked me to do a speech
about what would help you
all understand what
would make a difference
for kids like me
to learn better i said
ya i'll do it! but inside
i was really nervous
i was thinking, ya i was
thinking what if they
dont listen of talk me
seriously i thought how stupid

Try to get you
 to liston, and hope that
 you remember what
 I have said when
 you make laws so
 here are my
 number one reasons
 has been trying to get
 my school to find the
 best ways to help me
 in math, spelling, writing
 and find ways to
 keep me focused, and
 organized, she is also
 trying to get them to understand

and stress ^{that} i get really
 stressed out and sick ③
 when i get overwheled
 b / working not being
 right for me. My
 mom has been trying to
 get them to recognize
 that i have dyslexia since
 1st grad, now im in 5th. My teacher
 is just beginning to
 understand ~~but~~ ^{to} other teachers
 do not ~~prof-it~~ like my doctors
 individualized and others who right
 persons wd d, son's ways to
 help me i can have gotten really
 frustrated and mad because
 no one ^{cares} to listen at school.
 My parents have ~~ofend~~ ^{to} to send in

(This copy has been copied as written)

Hello my name is Tessa Lefante,
and i have dyslexia. when my mom asked
me to do a speech about what would help
you all understand what would make a
diffrens for kids like me to learn better i said
ya i'll do it but inside i was really nervous i
was thinking what if they don't listen or take
me seriously. i thought tho that i should try
to get you to listen and hop that you
remember what has happened to me when
you make laws. so sinc i only have a few
minutes i'm going to start giving you my
reasons. number one my mom has been
trying to get my school to do find the best
way to help me in math, spelling, writing and
ways to helps me stay focused and
organized. she is also trying to get them to

understand my anxiety and stress: i get really stressed out and sick when i get overwhelmed by work not being right for me. my mom has been trying to get them to recognize that i had dyslexia since 1st grade and now i'm in fifth grade. now my teacher is just beginning to understand but other teachers do not. People like my doctor, therapist, and others who write reports and dicribes ways to help me learn have gotten really frustrated and mad because no one seems to listen at school. my parents offered to send in an ipad or a laptop in 3ed grade, but no one could really understand how to use technology for kids with dyslexia. My mom new what I needed becuz she is a reading and speshull ed teacher. the school still wodnot lisen to proof. it mad me feel pretty bad and very sad becuz i just coldnt

do all the work they gave me.

what i'm trying to say is that we need to train out teachers how to understand that dyslexia is more than turning our letters around. It really affects me in most subjects but really makes math, writing and spelling hard.

I am asking you to please please train the teachers to recognize dyslexia and help kids as soon as they start to have trouble. Don't make kids wait to get help because it affects your whole life. i don't now wat midl school will be like for me but i hope the teachers there now about dyslexia and i hope that now you do too.

thank you for listning.

Testimony for HRB NO. 5562, An Act Concerning Special Education

Hello my name is Jane Lefante.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you regarding HRB No 5562, An Act Concerning Special Education.

As a parent of two children with a Dyslexia diagnosis, I support the bill but request changes and additions to it. While the bill addresses issues around recording the diagnosis specifically on the IEP, one of the critical requirements that is missing from this version is the professional development piece: students with both identified Dyslexia and those who are currently unidentified have to go to school every day and in many cases, experience horrific amounts of anxiety and stress because very well intentioned and intelligent Staff do not recognize the issues and how to help them. People who choose to teach are generally Society's nurturers, they want to help children learn but how can they help without the proper education and training? Further, without guidelines and laws that specifically call for ongoing education around a topic, school districts that are over-burdened with testing, teacher evaluation, more testing, huge shifts to more rigorous standards, etc. are not going to include this issue on their "to do" list.

Though I am already an experienced special education and reading teacher, I paid for and have enrolled in an additional master's degree program as well as two other certification programs to gain the knowledge I need to advocate for my girls and to act as a resource for other families. I am not in a position to diagnosis anyone with Dyslexia - frankly I am more interested in intervention because I enjoy being part of daily student successes, however I feel like there is a very superficial understanding of this learning disability and I want to provide support and advocate for students to get the help they need. Ultimately that is the bottom line in education: children having successful learning experiences.

My youngest child is here today speaking about her experiences and her hope for change. I can tell you that her school experience has been ripe with frustration and anxiety to the point of causing illness. I began advocating for her myself when she was just beginning her school career. It was 2 years later before her dyslexia was acknowledged but, the recommended programming was not in place despite multiple neuropsychological and medical reports stating her needs. Almost two years after that we are now beginning to see change: she is fifth grade. Sadly, our other daughter struggles significantly due to dyslexia that was not identified early enough.

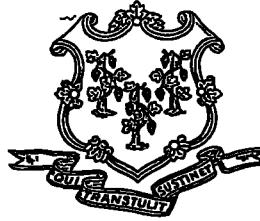
When I say that the financial expenditures needed to support our children with learning issues are tremendous, this descriptor doesn't begin to cover it. In our case, the short story is that we have paid well into the six figures for out-of-pocket services and evaluations. But there is very little a parent wouldn't do to help their struggling child.

Having shared some of my thoughts let me close by saying that I am proud of my district and believe my colleagues are doing what they can. We desperately need legislation to start the identification process early and for the service model to be inclusive vs. exclusive. Federal mandates and funding issues should not prevent students from receiving differentiated education when the research show us that being proactive in early identification and intervention is critical for success. Research has also shown us that the **lack of intervention** will cost us dearly later on. Please consider what you hear today. You have the power to change many futures. Thank you for listening.

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March 17th 2014

Good afternoon Representative Fleischmann, Senator Stillman, ranking members, and members of the Education Committee. I am Senator Cathy Osten, and I am here today to testify in support of House Bill 5562, which adds dyslexia to the individualized education program form used by planning and placement teams for services for children requiring special education.

Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability, and it is estimated that up to 20% of the nation's population suffer from some of the symptoms of dyslexia. Dyslexia, as a term, refers to a cluster of symptoms that result in difficulties with language skills, particularly reading. The core challenges students with dyslexia face are with word recognition, reading fluency, spelling, and writing. These challenges with reading are often attributed to a student's difficulty identifying the separate speech sounds within words or learning how letters represent those separate speech sounds. Additionally, students with less severe symptoms early in their education may experience increased trouble later on when they have to rely on more complex language skills such as grammar, understanding material in a textbook, or writing essays. While dyslexia is most often associated with reading and writing, students with dyslexia could also have problems with spoken language; they may have trouble expressing themselves clearly or trouble comprehending what others say to them. In addition to these academic challenges, dyslexia can also create emotional issues as well, adding to a student's struggles in school.

The broad array of challenges students with dyslexia experience demonstrates the need for action by schools, partnerships with parents, and individualized programs catered to each student. By adding dyslexia to the individualized education program form, this bill places dyslexia on the radar. It can help facilitate recognition and intervention so students with dyslexia can learn in environments that recognize their needs and facilitate their learning. House Bill 5562 helps students by adding dyslexia to the individualized education program form, thereby calling on schools to work with these students so they can best reach their potential.

I have received information from, Decoding Dyslexia, a group dedicated to raising awareness of dyslexia. At the behest of Allison Quirion, the Connecticut Chapter of Decoding Dyslexia was formed in February 2013. The parents help each other by

sharing experiences in the school system and consequently empowering one another to become better advocates for their children. I am grateful to Allison and the members of Decoding Dyslexia for sending me information about their experiences. These stories highlight the need for legislative action in order for our schools to truly take care of dyslexic students.

House Bill 5562 is a step in this direction because it adds dyslexia to the individualized education program form, raises awareness of this diagnosis as a learning disability, and calls on schools to create individualized courses of action for students. I respectfully ask the Committee to join me in support of House Bill 5562. Thank you.



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Statement of Brian S. Becker
State Representative for the 19th Assembly District
before the
Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly
March 17, 2014
in support of
RB 5562
An Act Concerning Dyslexia and Special Education

Chairman Fleischmann, Chairman Stillman, Ranking Member Ackert, Ranking Member Boucher, and the other distinguished members of the Education Committee, thank you for raising and taking the time to hear testimony on RB 5562, An Act Concerning Dyslexia and Special Education.

Approximately 20% of the population struggles with some level of dyslexia. Many people with dyslexia are brilliant, but struggle communicating that brilliance to others. Early screening and implementation of evidence-based programs have proven effective in helping people overcome (or at least cope well with) dyslexia.

I am sure that you will hear testimony today from many parents who will share with you their frustrations, anxiety, and pain, and those of their children with dyslexia who struggle to obtain the help they need. We should be making it easier for families to obtain educational services for their children with dyslexia. While RB 5562 adds "dyslexia" to the individualized special education form, more should be done. I recommend that the committee incorporate language from Proposed Bill No. 120 regarding professional development for teachers. By expanding professional training for our teachers to help them detect dyslexia and use appropriate intervention methods with students, we can help this special needs population overcome this disability and thrive in school and beyond.

Please support RB 5562 with the addition of expanded teacher training on dyslexia. It is the right thing to do. Thank you.