

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the House Health Committee. My name is Andrea Rowson. As a Dyslexia Therapist, Certified Trainer, Instructional Leader with Upper Arlington City Schools, and Associate Director of The Children's Dyslexia Center, I strongly support House Bill 436, which includes two important components: identification and professional development.

Research has shown early identification and intervention are essential to closing or narrowing the achievement gap between students who struggle to read and those who do not. The later we identify and intervene, the more time and resources we will spend and the less likely a student will be able to significantly close the gap. Identifying students who struggle is only the first step, and is only helpful if we have well-trained teachers who know how to remediate.

I would like to illustrate the importance of this bill with stories of two young students I've worked with in Central Ohio. I have changed their names for confidentiality.

The first involves a second grade student I will call Tim. Tim scored within the average range on reading assessments, but seemed very frustrated. In fact, he was found banging his head against a wall and telling his

parents his brain wasn't working. After being assessed with a variety of tools including those that measure phonological awareness, Tim was found to be twice exceptional. He was gifted *and* dyslexic. Once assessed, Tim began receiving explicit, structured literacy intervention, and after two years was able to read and write well above grade level. Had we been able to identify him earlier using a screener designed to catch deficits in phonological processing skills, he would not have had to endure the frustration and emotional trauma of thinking his brain wasn't working correctly.

The next student, a seventh grader I will call Kara, came to me after receiving special education services for six years. After receiving two years of explicit, structured intervention, Kara was exited from Special Education because she was reading at grade level. The teachers at her school simply hadn't known how to provide the instruction she needed.

I am fortunate to currently work with two committed organizations focused on preventing stories like those of Tim and Kara. The Columbus Children's Dyslexia Center has allowed me to witness first hand the benefit of providing teacher training based on high quality reading

research. The Upper Arlington School District has been working to ensure that appropriate screening and teacher training is a priority. We screen every kindergarten student for phonological processing skills and have begun to build sustainability by maintaining a certified trainer and certified practitioners at both initial and advanced levels. We have also begun to train all Kindergarten and First Grade staff in the science of reading. While I am very proud of my district, we are not the only ones. Pickerington, Olentangy, Marysville, Westerville, Lexington, Wheelersburg, and Heath have all focused on improving reading outcomes by establishing strong teacher training and screening protocols. Unfortunately, most districts are not implementing these procedures and many students are not proficient readers as a result.

School administrators might be concerned about how to implement this bill, but as we learn from districts that are beginning this process, it is simply reassigning priorities. As you notice from the Marysville report, districts can use existing funds such as Title I and IDEA to save money in the long run.

Having well-trained teachers provide instruction to meet the needs of most students takes fewer resources than having to increase the number of intervention specialists to later meet the demand of students who did not receive the early intervention and instruction they needed. In 2011, the Ohio Dyslexia Pilot Project (House Bill 96) was introduced. An evaluation of that project noted a decrease in the number of students identified as having a disability after receiving early intervention.

Early identification and effective instruction by well-trained educators is critical to providing a child a chance for a happy, successful life. In today's society, the pursuit of happiness is only available to those who read. And we live in a country that depends on the ability of its citizens to be literate and well-informed. Those who are unable to read and write are often left without a voice. According to the Literacy Project Foundation, three of five prisoners can't read. And, according to the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress scores, 64% of Ohio 4th graders are not proficient in reading. These numbers are unacceptable. House Bill 436 is one critical step in improving these statistics.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I appreciate your time and the opportunity to speak with you today, and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.