Hello, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Leslie Buford. I am a 27 year educator, working across the grade levels to teach struggling students how to read, write, speak, and spell. I have served as a school administrator responsible for curriculum, professional development, assessment, intervention planning, reporting. Currently, I am a clinical supervisor and language specialist at Marburn Academy, and I serve on the board of the International Dyslexia Association’s Central Ohio Branch who asked me to speak today.

This bill addresses many aspects of education that will impact teacher preparation and student achievement. I will speak about 3 provisions: The elimination of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, the exclusion of kindergarteners from identification and intervention for the Third Grade Reading Guarantee, and the elimination of the early childhood band of teacher licensure.

The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, or KRA, is currently used to meet the Third Grade Reading Guarantee requirement for a reading diagnostic to be administered by November of the Kindergarten year. We are not opposed to the elimination of this particular assessment tool, but we strongly advocate that every child must be given an evidence based literacy diagnostic screening by November of the Kindergarten year. By age 5, we have the ability identify 85-95% of the students who will later struggle to learn to read. But more importantly, if we identify these students BEFORE they fall behind their peers in reading skills, we have evidence based instructional methods that can address the underlying processing deficits BEFORE the child ever has to fail. We advocate that this bill should require that the KRA be replaced with an evidence based assessment of early reading indicators including phonemic awareness (specifically phoneme segmentation) and rapid naming.

In addition, this bill excludes kindergarteners from the identification and intervention requirement in the Third-Grade Reading Guarantee. We are strongly opposed to this change. While it may (according to the Ohio legislative services bill analysis) …decrease the cost for schools because they won’t have to implement interventions for kindergarten students that have pre-reading deficits, it simply shifts the identification of those students from kindergarten to the first grade, counteracting some or all of any savings.

We argue that the financial cost would not just be delayed, but would likely increase exponentially with each year that identification of reading deficits is delayed and intervention is withheld.

The statistics are clear that the later you intervene, the longer it takes a student to catch up, and the more intensive and expensive that remediation will have to be. But all of this pales in comparison to the human cost. When a student fails to read along with his or her peers, a cascade of academic, emotional and social consequences add mounting barriers to success. I have worked with so many dyslexic students who struggle with feelings of humiliation, anger, anxiety and depression, and it can take years to undo the psychological and emotional damage before those students are even accessible to high quality remediation.

We know how to find these students at age 4 or 5. We know what to do to build the phonemic awareness skills they are missing. We know how to prevent reading failure for many of these students by intervention. This bill allows schools to delay diagnosis and delay treatment, at great cost to the children and eventually, to our schools.

My third point is about the proposed change in teacher certification grade bands, eliminating the requirement for an early childhood designation for teachers in grades K-3. Early childhood is a unique moment in a child’s development. Developmental windows for rapid growth in language, numeracy, and self management open and close during this time frame. In K-3, the curriculum is designed to teach students HOW TO LEARN. Around 4th grade, the focus shifts to learning of content and integrating basic student skills in the service of higher order thinking and production of complex products. Of course, teachers are always supporting students as they continue to mature and are capable of more complex work, but the foundation for this is laid in K-3. Early childhood teachers must have the specialized knowledge of child development, number sense, and reading to make sure that our students are ready to access the full extent of the curriculum throughout their education.

Overall, the three provisions I have addressed in this bill seem designed to save money in the short term, while putting our most vulnerable students at even higher risk of academic and personal crisis. I say the costs, both financial and human, are too high. We must provide high quality universal screening beginning in Kindergarten, provide evidence based and timely intervention starting in kindergarten, and ensure that our PK-3 teachers have the requisite knowledge and skill to guide our children through this unique developmental stage.

Thank you.

**References:**

International Dyslexia Association:

Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading

Fact Sheet*: Universal Screening: K–2 Reading*

What Works Clearinghouse: IES PRACTICE GUIDE: *Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention and Multi-Tier Intervention in the Primary Grades*

Ohio Department of Education Website: *Ohio Third Grade Reading Guarantee Guidance Manual*