**Amanda Stern**

**SB 102 Proponent Testimony**

**Senate Education Committee**

**October 15, 2019**

Good morning Chairwoman Lehner and Ranking Member Fedor. My name is Amanda Stern. I am a resident of the city of Brecksville in Cuyahoga County. As a former special education provider, I am pleased to offer testimony in support of Senate Bill 102. Moreover, I would like to thank you Chairwoman Lehner and Senator Brenner, for bringing such important legislation forward and Senators Sykes and Fedor for co-sponsoring it.

Before having my son, I taught preschool children with special needs for 11 years. However, I never stopped being a teacher with the amount of teaching I have done at home with my wonderful son Domenic, who is now 8 years old and has been diagnosed with Dyslexia.

As a teacher, I had firsthand experience with teaching students in my preschool classroom who struggled with identifying letters, identifying sounds, and rhyming. Some of those children picked up letter identification and could pair them with the correct sounds and even sing me a nursery rhyme. Then there were the students, who despite all my efforts, were off to Kindergarten and still couldn’t identify all their letters and sounds. They would receive an IEP for the Kindergarten year.

My son was one of those kids who never picked up those skills even with a mom as an early childhood educator. My husband and I had to spend two years fighting to get an IEP.

Those two years were incredibly difficult and painful for Domenic and our family. Watching him go to school each day upset and anxious and then picking him up after school in tears was heartbreaking. This was every single day of our lives. It impacted him way beyond the walls of the school. It impacted every day life. The stress level for our family was off the charts.

As a parent, you are often faced with the “What if’s” of one of the hardest jobs in the world - parenting!

What if my son Domenic learned to talk earlier? Instead he began talking at the age of two and a half.

What if he didn’t have to go to private speech therapy and receive early intervention? Instead, Domenic could have had more time with his Legos.

What if my son could have learned the letters of his name and to rhyme in preschool? Instead, he had to practice each day at home.

What if in Kindergarten he learned his letters and their sounds? Instead, he was pulled out of his classroom for Response to Intervention, or RTI, services.

What if this smart little boy came home from first grade happy? Instead, he was crying because he failed his weekly spelling test and was made fun of because he couldn’t form his letters like his peers.

What if my son could have remained in his district? Instead, there was no structured literacy program available for him to help him learn how to read in what is one of the best school districts in the state.

What if Domenic did not have to miss out on doing things with his friends and playing sports simply because he has Dyslexia? Instead, he spent 2 days a week after his regular school day getting tutored because there was no Orton Gillingham program available for him at his school.

What if the school district recognized his Dyslexia? Instead we moved him to Lawrence, a wonderful private school. As a result of their phenomenal training in their code-breakers program, Domenic is reading! But I realize not every family can be so fortunate so implementing this screening in all public schools could be life changing for our state’s children.

What if Domenic had been diagnosed with Dyslexia and it was all because of Dyslexia Screening as proposed in this bill? According to the IDA - 20 % of the population have some of the symptoms of Dyslexia. One in five kids in each classroom across this country struggle with reading.

What if this bill was passed and no child had to struggle like my son Domenic did so early on in his educational career? My amazing son with Dyslexia who is very creative, a problem solver, determined, a natural builder, and an outside of the box thinker. He is a child with a plan to be President someday – he loves politics! - and work for NASA in his spare time.

What if Domenic did not have to go through all of this?

What if all the kids in the state of Ohio were screened for Dyslexia?

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.