

October 15, 2019

Chairwoman Peggy Lehner and Members of the Senate Education Committee

Marianne La Rosa, M.A./CCC-SLP, C/AOGPE  
Speech-Language Pathologist, Certified Dyslexia Specialist  
Language & Literacy Clinic  
67 Clairedan Drive  
Powell, OH 43065

Chairwoman Peggy Lehner and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill No. 102. My name is Marianne La Rosa, and I have been a speech-language pathologist for 33 years. I have worked in a community clinic, a public school, and for the past 10 years in private practice in Powell, Ohio. My area of specialty is language-based learning disabilities, namely dyslexia, in children grades K-8. I am testifying to discuss Senate Bill 102, and to share my professional experiences with regard to identifying and providing intervention for students with dyslexia.

In my practice, parents are seeking private evaluations, tutoring, and therapy for their child. The most common story I hear from parents is that their child is struggling to learn to read and write, but the school has not adequately addressed the issues. They often report that the child is becoming more anxious and resistant to reading and writing. I have seen hundreds of students struggle because their dyslexia was not identified until after they had begun to experience failure and frustration. Furthermore, in many cases, even if private psychologists confirmed the diagnosis of dyslexia, these students were still not given evidence-based dyslexia intervention in school. I have witnessed this all-too-common scenario result in bright, creative and highly capable students commenting that they feel “stupid,” confused, frustrated, and highly anxious. This can have long-

lasting consequences and does not have to happen! Statewide Dyslexia Screening is the first step to ensuring that Ohio students with dyslexia are identified early, in grades K-2, when intervention is the most effective.

These are the questions many parents ask me: “Why didn’t my child’s school know about dyslexia?” “Why don’t the schools test for dyslexia?” “Why do I have to fight so hard to get my child the appropriate reading intervention? What I have seen in my collaborations with various districts is that many schools do not recognize the markers for dyslexia and use appropriate measures to differentiate dyslexia from other types of reading problems.

However, there are school districts right here in Central Ohio that understand the profile of dyslexia and the science of teaching reading. These districts have made significant changes to ensure that no child with dyslexia slips by undetected. Districts such as Marysville, Olentangy, and Upper Arlington have been mentioned in previous hearings as exemplary districts that meet the needs of students with dyslexia. I was fortunate to be asked to sit at the table with the Marysville leadership team, led by K-6 Literacy Director, Steve Griffin, to help draft another version of the proposed Dyslexia Screening Bill. That draft was submitted in June and contained specific dyslexia markers to be measured. The version of SB 102 that is before us today is lacking in these key details.

In order to implement a statewide Dyslexia Screening program, it is recommended that a multidisciplinary committee of Dyslexia experts be formed. This would be comprised of certified dyslexia specialists, speech-language pathologists, psychologists, and members of the International Dyslexia Association, in conjunction with school administrators, teachers, ODE leaders and other stakeholders who understand public school policy. This collaborative group, named the Ohio Dyslexia Committee (ODC), would develop an Ohio Dyslexia Guidebook to provide the schools with the road map needed for successful implementation of this bill across all types of school districts.

Finally, early identification of dyslexia is the first step to reducing the need for costly special education services, and to ensuring that all students are given appropriate reading instruction based on scientific evidence. Students with dyslexia cross all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic lines. As a state, we must strive to build equity for all students, and we must ensure that scientific knowledge is translated into policy and practice throughout all Ohio school districts. As Dr. Sally Shaywitz, researcher at the Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity, has stated in numerous testimonies, **“With dyslexia, we don’t have a knowledge gap; we have an action gap.”**

We know how to identify and treat dyslexia; we need the ACTION through this dyslexia screening legislation to make it happen here in Ohio. Working together, we can get this done. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Marianne La Rosa