

October 15, 2019

Chairwoman Peggy Lehner and members of the Education Committee,

My name is Mike McGovern and my son Connor McGovern has dyslexia.

My son Connor was not identified as having dyslexia until 6<sup>th</sup> grade and, even then, it was by an evaluation from a third-party, NOT the school itself.

This led me to dedicate my time to improve the situation for those that have dyslexia. I want to avoid the heartbreak that my son and family experienced due to the lack of knowledge about dyslexia.

My advocacy work includes educating school districts, families, and dyslexia parent groups about identification and services for students with dyslexia. Most importantly, I am advocating to get proper legislation passed that will improve the lives of students with dyslexia.

This led me to become President of the International Dyslexia Association in Central Ohio and join Marburn Academy's Board a school that specializes in dyslexia and ADHD.

IDA supports the intention of SB102, but only if significant changes are made as detailed in Blythe Wood's presentation.

According to Yale University research, 1 in 5 have dyslexia. This represents roughly 350,000 students in Ohio.

The story I am going to tell has been repeated by thousands of parents across Ohio. I have personally heard these stories hundreds of times from families in rural areas, small cities, suburban and urban areas. The heartbreak I have heard repeats itself over and over.

Due to my son NOT being screened for dyslexia in kindergarten, he fell further and further behind in reading every year thereafter. He suffered both emotionally and socially. Eventually he received counseling for anxiety and depression, which are common with those struggling to read.

He wanted to read chapter books so badly like his peers, but he couldn't. He will never attain his full potential with his reading skills because he was not identified in kindergarten. It simply takes too long to remediate when you discover it at age 12.

This same story is being repeated every day and every year in Ohio. We need to stop this massive failure of thousands of kids in our educational system.

Children and families have suffered so much because they were not evaluated for dyslexia and properly addressed. The children had to suffer humiliation and embarrassment that comes with reading struggles. So many families have had their child held back in school and made to repeat a grade. Holding a child back in school does nothing to address or fix the problem.

I tell families all the time “your child is not broken, the public school system in Ohio is broken”.

As you consider the merits of this bill please remember this critical data:

According to ODE’s 2018 document “Ohio’s Plan to Raise Literacy”:

- 62% Ohio’s 4<sup>th</sup> graders are **NOT** proficient in reading
- 64% Ohio’s 8<sup>th</sup> graders are **NOT** proficient in reading

Since 2007, reading levels have ranged from 61% - 66% **NOT** proficient in reading. This low performance in Ohio is similar to the literacy performance of students across America:

According to the U.S. Department of Education’s 2017 “Nation’s Report Card”:

- 63% 4<sup>th</sup> graders are **NOT** proficient in reading
- 64% 8<sup>th</sup> graders are **NOT** proficient in reading
- 63% 12<sup>th</sup> graders are **NOT** proficient in reading

Since 1992, the percentages have remained stagnant. 63% - 71% of students in the US are **NOT** proficient in reading. Our system for identifying and addressing reading issues is broken. You cannot argue with decades of statistics.

There is no defense of the current system employed to identify and address literacy issues in Ohio. Every system is perfectly designed to achieve its current results and the system in Ohio is producing failure.

MRI’s show clearly that people with dyslexia use different circuits to process reading and writing. This means they learn to read and write differently and we can only find that out if we screen them for dyslexia. Once we determine they have dyslexia we can teach them based on how science proves **they learn** to read and write proficiently.

The societal impact of teaching hundreds of thousands of children how to read at grade level will be massive. It will positively affect the economy, it will lower the prison population, and it will greatly improve the emotional well being of so many children and families.

Every child should be screened for dyslexia so schools will know that child learns differently and therefore needs to be taught to read using Structured Literacy at an appropriate level of intensity. No school should be allowed to say no to screening for dyslexia.

No district should be able to say, "We are not going to find out how this child learns to read. Instead, we are going to teach him how we teach everyone else, regardless of our poor outcomes." We need strong legislation that guarantees that all children become proficient readers. We need legislation that will end the practices that have produced 2/3 of students in Ohio who are NOT proficient readers.

Having all children screened for dyslexia will be a major step in fixing these heartbreaking stories.

You are likely to hear from those opposed to screening a child for dyslexia. They may claim funding challenges, training challenges, implementation issues, or other reasons.

By resisting SB102, they are NOT taking the responsibility of properly teaching reading to approximately 350,000 children in Ohio. All districts have an ethical duty to find out how each child learns to read and teach them accordingly.

**At its core a school's top priority is to teach a child how to read.**

**Nothing is more important.**

**Yet, without requiring proper screening for dyslexia and requiring the proper instructional method of Structured Literacy, 20% of children will NOT become proficient readers.**

How can any school district, organization or other group oppose a child's right to learn how to read?

Thanks for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mike McGovern