

Thank you Senator Lehner and the Committee for allowing me to testify

My name is Mary Lou Hittle and I am the Co-Founder of Reading Matters Westerville, a much needed advocacy group for families of students with dyslexic profiles. My daughter is a middle schooler with dyslexia and language learning struggles. The burden of securing federally mandated reading interventions for her learning challenges in Westerville has fallen to us, her parents. Like many parents in central Ohio, we have spent the last 3 years advocating on her behalf.

- We pushed for her to be evaluated at the outset
- We had to push to make sure Structured Literacy was being used for her intervention
- We had to push for the appropriate amount of time to administer those tools
- We pushed for the right accommodations to be put in place and adhered to in the general education classroom.

Three years into our daughters IEP we learned that her significant speech and language struggles, which the district had failed to identify, were hindering her progress. Those language struggles, which often accompany dyslexia, were discovered because we requested an independent educational evaluation. As a result of that private evaluation it was necessary to almost double the amount of intervention time that she required (as she entered middle school). For clarity sake, I say again, this was ALL parent driven because the district staff we encountered were not adequately trained to identify dyslexia and its related conditions. Honestly, there were times when it was clear that many of the staff have very limited understanding of the appropriate interventions needed for dyslexia. As a result of their lack of knowledge and training, our daughter has lost valuable time. We have lost faith in the district.

Many children with dyslexia are NOT thriving in many, if not most, central Ohio school districts. Our district is only beginning to change its course for supporting dyslexia. Those changes are still fragile and not robust enough. Furthermore, the changes that have been implemented are not consistent across the district, fall short in some areas and lack transparency. We do know, the higher your grade level the fewer resources available. This is especially detrimental because the older you are, the longer it takes to remediate dyslexia. HB 436 will help provide the much needed and long over due funding for ALL school districts, throughout the state, to fully embrace the changes that are needed to provide appropriate and federally mandated reading interventions for all students with dyslexic profiles.

Lastly, I'd like to share a little about the significant financial impact this has had on our family

- We have spent - \$18,000 for private tutoring over the last 3 years
- Our portion of tuition at a private school is \$15,000 (x 3 years = \$45,000)
- That's nearly \$65,000 to secure an appropriate education for my daughter and that's just through middle school.

I shudder to think where our daughter would be if we could not afford the additional private remediations and our portion of the tuition at the private school going forward. Furthermore, there is no way a family at or below poverty level could do what we have done for our daughter. In fact, many families, even above poverty level, are not able to do this. If you fail to approve HB 436 you are failing to fund federally mandated reading interventions and many children in Ohio will be morally excluded. On behalf of the families of children with dyslexic profiles please approve HB 436. They deserve access to the tools they need to thrive!! As it stands now, they are barely surviving.

Thank you!