**Testimony before the Ohio Senate Education Committee 10-15-19 --- 5 min limit**

Good afternoon and thank you.

My name is Brett Tingley and I am the parent of a child with dyslexia in the Upper Arlington public schools.

Words cannot describe how proud I am of my daughter, Ava. She has become an amazing, creative, and powerful young woman. But there was a time when we didn’t think she would graduate from high school, let alone go to college.

As a kindergartener, Ava was incredibly spirited, bright, and did everything in her power to keep up with her big brothers. In school, though, it quickly became obvious that Ava was not learning to read. She couldn’t spell her name or write the ABC’s. Ava was farther and farther behind every day*.*

Things didn’t add up. Ava was quick-witted, able to reason well yet she couldn’t read.

We tried to work with her teachers and administrators. Our school district didn’t have the tools to identify Ava as dyslexic or help her. In fact, they actively fought that designation. Through expensive private assessments, we had to “prove” to the school system that she was in fact dyslexic. Even then, they were resistant and lacked the appropriate remediation methods.

As a result, we were forced to pull our daughter from our local public school and drive her every day to a $30,000 per year private school, Marburn Academy.

The hard costs of Ava’s dyslexia were substantial: neuropsychologist evaluations, tutoring, and Marburn’s near college priced tuition. The hidden costs—the costs to Ava—were far greater: lost self-esteem, lost self-confidence. I really don’t know how to calculate the cost of a child being told she’s stupid because she can’t read.

But our family’s journey **has a happy ending**. We formed a grass roots parent group UA-KID, Upper Arlington kids identified with dyslexia. We educated ourselves and found that schools know very little about dyslexia or the science of reading even after the United States Congress commissioned the National Reading Panel almost 2 decades ago. With the power of numbers behind our group, we went into meetings with school officials, and began to educate them. We discovered that dyslexia can be identified as early as kindergarten, and then, given the NRP’s recommended instruction, they could learn to read*.* If dyslexia is caught early, the chances are far greater that the difficulties can be successfully remediated. **Time is of the essence!**

For Ava and other children in need, our school district initially refused to help and so UA-KID filed a systemic group complaint with the Ohio Department of Education. ODE found in our favor and today UA is now in compliance with federal IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) law. Every kindergartener is screened for dyslexia and given structured literacy for remediation as recommended by the 2000 National Reading Panel findings.

And I am happy to share with you - this month—against what seemed impossible odds 12 years ago—my daughter is finishing up her college applications. She will go to university and will have the opportunity to follow her dreams!

Ava’s struggle and her triumph make me incredibly proud. It also brings into sharp focus the needs of hundreds of thousands—millions—of children and families who are out there struggling today.

I’ve come to see reading as a civil right. Education is the keystone for personal wellbeing and prosperity, for thriving communities, for innovation. And an educated citizenry is essential for democracy.

Increasingly, and all too often, where you start in life defines how far you will go. Add dyslexia to the mix, and the odds stacked against you are nearly insurmountable. Young people who cannot read will never have the keys to learn, to express themselves, to create the life they might imagine.

For children in rural communities, small towns, low income cities, resource and access issues strike especially hard. Privately evaluating a child so a district takes notice can cost thousands of dollars (though school screener is CHEAP). Private tutoring costs are anywhere from $50-$100 an hour. Meetings with your school district with an advocate and an attorney can be $300- $400 an hour.

After UA-KID’s success, other parent groups all over central Ohio and now all over the country asking, ‘how did you do it?’

To help re-balance educational opportunity, we established OH-KID, **Ohio** kids identified with dyslexia, whose sole purpose is to help parents band together to fight for their dyslexic children. We give them UA KID’s playbook. For districts that are resistant, as UA was, we mentor them to move to action and make change happen by whatever means necessary. Our children have no time to spare.

I want to be plain here. My concerns are the bifurcation of opportunity I see. Initially only wealthy districts had the resources to come together to affect change. We first mentored dyslexic parent groups in Olentangy, Bexley, and Dublin. As word spread, we mentored groups in Hilliard, Westerville, and Worthington. Today OH-KID represents a grassroots coalition of 19 parent groups. Our reach extends to Medina, Mount Vernon, Upper Sandusky, Ashland, Willard, and 6 other districts, including our newest member – Columbus Public Schools. All told, we have parent groups in school systems totaling over 170,000 students all over Ohio!

Unfortunately, participating in parent groups takes time and money, luxuries unavailable to many families. We have found the more resource stressed a district is the lower the participation in these parent groups.

Ohio has the opportunity to step up. We can extend the full rights of educational opportunity equally among 11 million Ohioans. We need this legislation and we support SB102 only with the modifications that Blythe Wood identified.

This legislation will change lives and save lives.

So on behalf of the 170,000 students and their families represented by OH-KID we thank you for your efforts in passing this critical legislation, with significant modifications, that will level the playing field ------Because every child in every district deserves to learn to read and to follow their dreams!