

## Testimony

Ways and Means Committee, Thursday, February 18, 2015

HB 278: Support

As an academic therapist and certified teacher in the state of Maryland I am writing to state that I support the forming of a Dyslexia Task Force to study screening and teacher training. Currently, there are several reading programs in Maryland universities that address the essential components of reading instruction. For the most part those programs are effective in helping teachers to instruct many students who struggle with reading. However, what many of us (public school teachers) have found is that there are still students we are unable to reach. There are students who never excel in reading even after teachers have been endorsed by the state of Maryland as reading instructors. It is even more difficult to face the parents of students who have been receiving reading classes for years only to make such minimal progress.

I was one of those teachers. My first introduction to dyslexia was through the Dyslexia Tutoring Program in Baltimore. I later received more reading instruction through a private provider and then through the Atlantic Seaboard Dyslexia Education Center (ASDEC). The intense instruction I received at ASDEC is research based and more effective than any of the reading classes I have ever attended. I have been able to use some of the strategies in my current reading intervention classes because I now truly understand what it takes to move students forward in reading. The students' scores also demonstrate that progress. I only use a few of those strategies at school, but I use everything I've been taught in my own private practice. The students I see privately excel because I know dyslexia exists. Parents are frustrated that they know why their children aren't doing well academically, but the academic setting is in denial. It's upsetting to sit in IEP meetings and not be able say a student is dyslexic because my state doesn't recognize it or just saying 'dyslexia' is so controversial. It's also upsetting to know that these same students will not receive the instruction they need because education professionals fail or are unable to recognize it. Educators who do recognize why these students are suffering receive no support from the school systems in which they work.

Maryland can no longer afford to have teachers who aren't prepared to teach even the most severe cases of reading. The answer to the reading difficulties our students face can't always be found in the typical reading-in-a-box program. Teachers need to truly understand the structure of English and the necessary practices that make ALL students successful. The state of Maryland has been ranked as number one in the nation for 5 consecutive years. In 2015, Maryland was ranked as third in the nation. We're still in the top five best school systems in the nation, but that doesn't mean we're meeting the needs of all students. Twenty percent of the population suffers from dyslexia and other severe reading disabilities. Maryland needs to be just as responsible for the 20% as they are for the other 80%. The International Dyslexia Association formulated the *Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading*. Currently, there are sixteen universities in the nation who have accepted these practices and are preparing some of the top reading teachers in our country. Four of those universities are located in the states that were ranked first and second in our nation for 2015. Help us to remain in the top by forming the task force. Let's prepare ALL of our current and future teachers with the effective instruction provided by organizations like ASDEC. Let's stop graduating students who can't read the newspaper. Let's stop using poor intervention practices that result in minimal success. Let's give our students a chance at being the best by giving them the best at the start of their school careers. We can only be the best if our teachers have the best preparation.

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