



Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, Members of the Educational and Cultural Affairs Committee

RE: LD 1526 An Act to Provide Grants to Support Reading Proficiency Programming in Schools

My name is Carrie Woodcock I live in Saco, I am the parent of two children with different abilities, (disabilities) and the Executive Director for Maine Parent Federation (MPF). I am intentionally using the term different abilities as opposed to disabilities to acknowledge that every individual has different abilities. MPF is the federally funded Parent Training and Information Center (PTI), Family to Family Health Information Center (F2FHIC) and Statewide Family Network. We assist families of children with different abilities to navigate all systems of care including education. I am submitting this testimony in support of LD 1526 An Act to Provide Grants to Support Reading Proficiency Programming in Schools.

Today I want to speak to you more from a parent perspective than a professional perspective. My son Noah, who is now 18, was diagnosed with Dyslexia at the age of 9 as he was entering his 2nd grade year of schooling. Noah's diagnosis came after spending a week with his grandmother, a former special educator and first grade teacher. When she expressed concern about his reading abilities, I approached the school to inquire about a referral for an evaluation. I was told by the school that Noah's reading levels, according to the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) was at grade level and therefore he did not need an assessment or Response to Intervention.

Despite, this I inquired with my neighbor, the Director for the Dyslexia Center in Portland. Per her recommendations I was able to privately obtain a full Independent Neuropsychological Evaluation. The results showed that not only did Noah have Dyslexia he also had ADHD and recommended intense science-based reading interventions. I provided the school with this evaluation and was again denied any interventions. I inquired about the phonics program the school was using and was told Reader's Workshop, at the time not a science-based reading program. There is also now a lot of research showing how Reader's Workshop has failed many of students in all our classrooms (see Sold a Story podcast).

Outside of school we decided Noah needed intervention and we put him on the waitlist to receive services through the Dyslexia Center and provided him with private tutoring.

I continued my efforts to advocate for services through the school throughout Noah's 2nd grade year to no avail. As Noah changed schools and entered 3rd grade, I once again advocated for his needs through the new school's leadership. This time when performing the DRA and considering the independent evaluation, it was determined Noah was at least 2 years behind in his reading performance. This was not due to regression over the summer and they were not sure how any DRA in the past year could have reflected that Noah was reading at grade level.

It took me a year and half of advocating for Noah's reading needs before he was identified and provided intervention through his school system. If it was not for having a grandmother that was a teacher, a neighbor who worked in the profession, and myself who also works in the profession Noah may never have been identified.

The story of Noah is one that is repeated over and over in our State. In my office I am often the individual taking phone calls from parents whose children are struggling with what special education labels as a Specific Learning Disability. They are struggling to get identified as our state's identification process for a Specific Learning Disability is one of the most difficult to qualify. We are



also seeing schools blaming the gap in learning on the gap in instruction from the pandemic and based on this reasoning denying further evaluation and/or RTI.

The interventions which are being provided in our schools are not always science-based nor enough to move the needle forward for these students. Science-based programs like Wilson, Lips, and Spire are often only offered through Special Education services and not available to all students in our schools. By the time students are identified these programs are not enough to close the gap. If it were not for Noah receiving Orton-Gillingham privately (often referred to the Cadillac of reading intervention) I am confident he never would have closed the gap. I shudder to think what that would have meant for Noah now and in his future.

If you are unable to read you will never have access to your education. When these students go unidentified, they often get labeled as behavior students and are disciplined further alienating them from their education and their peers. The damage to their self-esteem is immeasurable and the alternative pathway they experience can lead to failure academically, socially, and emotionally. These students have great minds they just learn differently. Our schools need to not only identify them we need to teach them in the way in which they learn.

It has not been easy for Noah. I am so proud to be his mom and to see what he has overcome and accomplished in his life. He has worked so hard, often harder than his peers, his perseverance is admirable.

I hope this legislation can bring to more individuals like Noah reading identification and interventions that will positively impact their pathway. For this reason, I ask this committee to please support this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Carrie Woodcock
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Maine Parent Federation