

May 2, 2023

Testimony in **Support** of LD 1526, An Act to Provide Grants to Support Reading Proficiency Programming in Schools.

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and the distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs.

Thank you Rep Brennan for bringing this important bill. My name is Nancy Cronin, I live in Fayette Maine, and I am a parent of a teenager with profound dyslexia. I also have dyslexia as does my brother and sister. I received special education for specific learning disability in Augusta Maine in 1978 with dyslexia. Three years after the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, forerunner to IDEA. I knew what dyslexia looked and felt like. When my son was ready, I knew what to look for but was surprised at how difficult it was to get what he needed.

My son was formally identified as having a Specific Learning Disability in Kindergarten. I immediately started advocating for a multi-sensory, structured literacy program that is heavy with phonics. The school said that they knew what they were doing and I knew that, as a Mother, I had no right to ask additional questions until they tried the schools interventions. My son continually came home with flash cards for sight words but he didn't seem to understand how to read. At my sons 3rd year re-evaluation we found that he hadn't improved at all, he was still reading at a Pre-K level. A teacher said to me, trying to comfort me, "today with technology it doesn't matter that much if he doesn't learn how to read." Ridiculous, I thought, my son *will* be literate. I went to the school and said this is not adequate according to the law and my son needed a reading specialist in orton-gillingham. He was so behind and lost so much ground but during Covid my son was able to receive tutoring from an orton-gillingham specialist with intensity. He went from a pre-k level of reading to fifth-grade in a year and a half.

Today, my son is in 7th grade and he receives special education for spelling which is the expression part of dyslexia – but he can read at grade level, albeit it takes him longer. Today on our way to school he couldn't stop talking about a book that he is reading that he can't put down. I have no doubt that my son will go to college and one day enter the workforce to share his amazingly unique mind.

One in five children have dyslexia. Only a small percentage of those children will be eligible for special education. Many won't NEED special education. But they will be failed if schools don't know how to teach structured literacy. Unfortunately, those kids will not just pick it up. Reading needs to be learned. Literacy IS important. Knowing how to *teach* reading is

important. I hope you will support this bill to give teachers the tools they need to open the world of literacy to all students.

This bill is a start. It needs to be so much more – but if this is the step that people are ready to take. Please take it.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input and I am available for any questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "John Lee".