

Good Morning House Education Committee Members,

First and foremost, I want to thank each member of this committee for the time and energy put into engaging in difficult discussions around a topic with so many passionate, intelligent yet different opinions. There is no debate that many children are failing through our well intentioned gaps yet there seems to be a hesitancy to take accountability, or maybe that isn't the right word. As an advocate when I read the new draft of the bill I struggle with how I feel. On one hand I can appreciate the intention and rationale behind the changes in language and hesitancy to create new laws. On paper and logically it makes sense. You have heard professional after professional come in this room and testify to their experience teaching and identifying struggling readers and they said over and over that they didn't need a new law because they already have these in place. , You heard from districts that have the privilege of more resources with amazing programs and ideas for helping improvise literacy scores testify about some truly inspiring ideas while parents from their very districts sat in the room questioning why their children didn't deserve that same experience.

As an advocate I always try to consider the opposite view points and understand the values driving the discussion. When I think about the conversations I have listened to, the data I have seen I struggle to answer the question why you shouldn't include more of the original language in this bill. As in what is the actual negative impact on the situation versus the potential for positive outcomes. If the laws we currently had in place were adequate we wouldn't see our scores declining. We identify everything in today's world, you can't do much without filling out some form with some labels to check off, I struggle with the arguments about over identifying dyslexia because of a definition in a law. If our educators and administration is as skilled as they have presented, and as I know they are, the rate of identification shouldn't be impacted by having the label because labels shouldn't matter if a child is struggling and needs help.

But they do matter to our children. For so many years Peyton struggled in school and he has always blamed himself. Questioned why he wasn't smart enough like his friends. He blamed himself, he thought something was wrong with him. There is nothing wrong with him and the first time he realized that was when he learned about dyslexia. When he learned that maybe it wasn't that he wasn't smart enough it was that he learned differently. For the first time you could see that he had hope that someday he might be able to do things just like other kids. When you took the word dyslexia out completely it almost felt like someone was trying to take that ownership from him.

I am here today to ask this committee to reconsider all of the changes in the language of the bill. I understand a need to take this discussion slowly and methodically but I do not believe this bill is the right step and I think the benefit of a more balanced compromise moving forward is too important to overlook. More than 40 other states have specific dyslexia bills already in place which means there are many alternative ideas and resources to consider. Wisconsin recently passed its dyslexia legislation, that was after significant study and advisory conversations. Those conversations gave members of the public, parents and professionals an voice at the table and the outcome has been evident in their data. I have included the link to the Wisconsin Dyslexia Manual/handbook as well as the website for the legislative study committee. I hope this committee will consider language in the new bill that identifies a committee or body similarly diverse and inclusive that will give this matter further consideration outside of the census based or act 173 conversation. If the committee isn't ready to use the more comprehensive and

detailed language in a bill at this time I propose the acknowledgement and consideration of a collaborative group of professionals and people living in the system, students with dyslexia, and legislators that can take the time to parse our where the balance is for Vermont. The professionals and legislators have had decades to show your voters a reason to allow them to continue to determine the solution and it isn't working. Not on a scale that is acceptable by your standards or mine. I do not think that there are such differing opinions when we get passed the specific language and research each perspective uses and If given a more open and transparent avenue and valued voice together Vermont can become a leader in literacy for the nation.