

Good afternoon and thank you to Chairman Campion and the rest of the committee for taking the time today to hear from myself, Jamie and Sandra. In an effort to be concise and not repetitive I am going to try to keep my testimony brief but want to echo that I agree with the points they shared today. I am here today to strongly advocate against delaying the rule change related to Specific Learning Disabilities especially. I am a parent of three children, two of whom are living with disabilities including learning disabilities. As a parent I know first hand this rule change would have changed the trajectory of my own son and stopped the increasing stress and isolation he faced due to the lack of appropriate intervention and identification of his learning disabilities. As an advocate I support families in many different buildings and districts across Vermont and have seen multiple children be denied eligibility due to not having enough measures to show a severe discrepancy, these children are often viewed as a behavior problem and while their disruptions clearly come from the frustrational level work and their learning disabilities their behavior is what they are given support for. By treating behavior as the only lense we view these children struggling with, we set them up for stigmas and stress that impact their ability to access their education as well as their overall sense of self.

I testified briefly to the house education committee on this issue before they passed the bill out of committee and I'd like to briefly share my thoughts again with you all. It makes me sad and disappointed to hear such a focus on the stress and preparation of districts and educators and not hear more intentional focus on our children living and struggling with potentially unidentified disabilities. Even if I thought the delay was appropriate it would be really helpful to feel like the focus on the shift is not just based on the comfort and needs of professionals. Our children and students with disabilities must be at the forefront of our discussion and should not be left unspoken about. As a member of various groups and councils I know firsthand some of the amazing work being done over the last year to help prepare for this by Jacqui Kelleher and her team at the AOE, they are available and able to provide technical support to those in need of it before July and I hope this committee has it will hear from her and her team directly on how they have and can support districts and educators without

delaying this change. The risk of over identifying should not and cannot be greater than the potential to help those with real needs sooner. If we are providing comprehensive and quality evaluations and interventions this change shouldn't feel so overwhelming to those who already have the knowledge and ability to make this shift, and for those who need support the AOE is prepared and ready to support them with technical assistance and we should give the AOE the opportunity to lead this work on the current timeline.

Someone recently told myself and a fellow advocate that we are privileged by our level of knowledge and the access we have to those in the system or leadership positions, now full disclosure as someone with a disability myself, two sons living with disabilities and a family that struggles financially I have never seen myself as privileged in that way before. But they weren't totally wrong, I do spend a lot of time in many meetings for many students across the state and what that has taught me is there are many children who are not being identified who are struggling with other identified needs that are being ignored by the current structure and I wish that the families I work with had a stronger voice in this room but even getting myself a voice today was challenging, please do not think that this is a minor issue. It really isn't and it shouldn't be delayed specifically for one group due to preparation from the field.

For those that may remember about two years ago right around this time I was testifying about rule changes and dyslexia and I was very emotional because we had just learned through an independent evaluation my son had profound learning disabilities that hadn't been appropriately identified or supported from kindergarten until 7th grade. Had there been less reliance on a discrepancy model it would have been fully identified appropriately much sooner and his behaviors and isolation likely would have been much less. Since that time my son had made huge gains and progress in reading and math and that is due to the collaborative path his team has taken by focusing on his strengths and weaknesses rather than just the documentation collected during assessment and grading. I share that because I have seen first hand that we do have many districts and

educators who are ready for this change if if they aren't the voices you hear in this room, and we have a team at the AOE who is ready and able to provide technical support, and parents who are ready to support their families using the flexibility that this change will allow to help not only identify their children with learning disabilities but begin to provide the interventions and supports that will ultimately be needed and to do so before the cost and intensity escalate as a child gets older.

Thank you