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Testimony Re: House Bill 5426 and 5887 Relating to Education – Screening and Education of Children with Dyslexia/Other Related Disorders and RI Certifications/Right to Read Act

House Health, Education & Welfare Committee

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for the intent of House Bills 5426 and 5887 which would require bold action to identify and address reading difficulties for children in Rhode Island, with a focus on the early grades.

Currently, only 40% of third graders in Rhode Island are meeting expectations for reading. Reading proficiency in third grade is a key predictor of school success and high school graduation. Research shows that children who are not proficient readers by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers.

A 2017 *Education Week* article states that the National Institutes of Health estimates that **between 6 percent and 17 percent of school-age children have some form of dyslexia.** The NIH funds research studies to identify the prevalence and best treatment options. A 2016 MIT study found that dyslexia is associated with other learning challenges such as face and object recognition and may be associated with a distinctive brain pattern with diminished perceptual learning. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many children with dyslexia believe they are not good at school, or lack potential. However, there is evidence that people with dyslexia have great potential and are often exceptional thinkers.

Without effective identification, support, and instructional intervention, children with dyslexia and other learning differences have difficulty achieving their full potential.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT recognizes that the requirements outlined in this bill will take significant resources which may require a phased-in approach, so we offer the following recommended priorities focused on grades PK through 2:

- Recognize in statute that **dyslexia is a significant condition** affecting children's education that requires focused attention and state support.
- As recommended nationally, establish strong protocols to provide **universal screening for dyslexia in kindergarten through Grade 2.** Measure LEA compliance with screening requirements.

- Ensure that **all teachers of students in grades K through 2** have been trained in research-based methods to teach reading and meet the needs of students with dyslexia. We suggest incorporating this required training into the state's PK to Grade 2 teacher certification and require teachers of those grades to have this certification (which is now only required for PK and Kindergarten teachers). We also suggest that the state provide reading and dyslexia training endorsement to teachers who already have PK to Grade 2 certification.
- Provide resources to **promote LEA adoption and implementation of research-based general and reading curricula** in grades PK through 2. The state's Pre-K program has identified 3 recommended curricula and provides support for implementation. This should also be done for grades K through 2.
- **Invest in high-quality early childhood education** through State Pre-K, home visiting, and child care. Language and early literacy skills begin developing at birth. Background knowledge about the world and verbal language skills can be expanded through participation in high-quality early childhood education programs and is an essential part of learning to read.

Thank you for considering legislation to address K through Grade 2 reading instruction and dyslexia. Meeting the state's goals of doubling reading 3rd grade reading proficiency will take bold action.