



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: H-7052 Regarding Dyslexia
House Health, Education, and Welfare Committee
January 13, 2016
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Mr. Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 7052.

As you may know, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the United Way of Rhode Island recently kicked off the Rhode Island Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, a statewide campaign to raise awareness about the importance of grade-level reading and spur action to improve the percentage of Rhode Island children who are reading proficiently by the end of third grade. 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.

Key aspects of the Campaign include improving school readiness, reducing summer learning loss, reducing chronic absence, and ensuring high-quality literacy instruction in the early years. High-quality literacy instruction includes assurances that our educators have the skills, tools, and support they need to identify struggling readers and provide these children with the additional support they need to succeed. A key part of this goal is ensuring that children with reading disabilities, such as dyslexia, are identified early and that targeted intervention is provided to meet their specific needs.

Last year, we supported the bill that created a Special Legislative Commission to Assess and Make Recommendations on the Educational Needs of Children with Dyslexia and/or Reading Disabilities. This Commission is still meeting. In fact, they had a meeting today. They are expected to complete their work and present recommendations very soon. We hope that these recommendations will include a comprehensive set of strategies, including legislation, to address the needs of children with reading disabilities.

In the meantime, we would like to lend our support to House Bill 7052, which includes a key strategy for ensuring that children with dyslexia and other reading disabilities receive the support they need by requiring that dyslexia-targeted assistance be a required activity included in literacy plans, as appropriate. Rhode Island's Comprehensive Literacy Plan requires schools to screen and review the reading achievement of every student, every year to identify students who are not succeeding with regular reading instruction, and we believe that that literacy plan is the place to address the needs of students with reading disabilities, including dyslexia.

We look forward to working with the Special Legislative Commission to Assess and Make Recommendations on the Educational Needs of Children with Dyslexia and/or Reading Disabilities and all of you to develop a comprehensive set of strategies to ensure that all Rhode Island children receive the support they need to reach the key milestone of reading proficiency by the end of third grade. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.