

January 27, 2021

RE: HB 237/SB 126  
Maryland House of Delegates  
House Ways of Means Committee  
6 Bladen St.  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Testimony in Support of HB 237 / SB 126  
**MSDE- Early Literacy and Dyslexia Practices- Guidance and Assistance**

Chair and Members of the Committee:

I am urging you to support the Reading & Dyslexia Handbook bill being proposed this legislative session, HB 237 / SB 126. Five to 15%, or 14.5- 43.5 million Americans have been diagnosed with dyslexia and still may not be getting the free and appropriate public education they need to be successful socially, emotionally, and academically. Studies have shown that 80% of the prison inmates in Texas are functionally illiterate and 48% have dyslexia. There is still an unknown percentage of students and adults who have gone undiagnosed as well. The time is now for school districts to have properly trained teachers to identify, teach, and accommodate students with dyslexia. Reading and writing are civil rights, and all students should be allowed the opportunity for success.

I have been a special educator for a decade, and I began my career at a private dyslexia school in the suburbs of Atlanta as an elementary educator. I was trained under an Orton-Gillingham Fellow and am endorsed at the Associate level through the Orton-Gillingham Academy. I also worked at the Lab School of Washington which services students with language-based learning differences and I've seen how defeated kids are when they leave the public school system to enter a place that knows how to support their needs. I also spent four years in Howard County Public schools at the secondary level. By the time students reach their secondary years, behavior problems begin to arise. Teachers are not properly equipped to troubleshoot or get to the root of the cause due to lack of knowledge and training. At this point, students have fallen out of love with school and the work becomes impossible in their eyes and the negative cycle of student failure continues.

I advocate for dyslexia in my personal time on various social media platforms bringing global awareness to this critical issue. I have seen students thrive first-hand when they receive the appropriate approach and instruction to support their needs; they're truly able to unlock their potential. As I stated before, reading and writing are critical life skills and the cornerstone to education. By taking away the ability to read, students may turn to unfavorable hobbies that don't deem them productive citizens in society. More specifically, as an educator of color, I worry about the BIPOC community and their ability to receive an equal opportunity as their white counterparts.

Passing HB 237 / SB 126 will be life changing for so many students, families, and the state of Maryland's education system. Please return a favorable report and move forward with HB 237 / SB 126 so MSDE will be tasked with working with stakeholders to create a handbook that will help school systems to better identify and provide services to all children with dyslexia across the entire state of Maryland.

Thank you for your time and consideration.  
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