

House Testimony
House Bill 237
Dyslexia Handbook

My name is Stephanie Carr, and I am a former high school general education teacher, current Co-Chair of Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee for Howard County, one of five founding members of the Decoding Dyslexia Howard County Chapter, and most importantly a parent to three children with disabilities who all share dyslexia. I am writing in support of House Bill 237, the Reading and Dyslexia Handbook that would provide much needed guidance to the local school districts of Maryland on changing the long-term practices of reading and literacy instruction that have not provided all children with the basic reading ability.

As a former high school general education teacher, I experienced firsthand the damage inappropriate core instruction at the elementary level inflicts, how the lack of evidence-based interventions was unable to remediate the skills students did not have, and the inability for students to comprehend curriculum required to graduate. By the time a student enters ninth grade, the gap between a students' grade level and their academic ability had grown so wide that the focus is not on the long-term effects of the inability to read proficiently but on passing standardized tests and graduation are the only focus. Fortunately protocols to combat these practices will be outlined with the passage of the Reading and Dyslexia Handbook bill. The Maryland State Department of Education will be providing local districts guidelines to provide evidence-based interventions for students through twelfth grade. Local school district will be responsible for providing appropriate core instruction and a system of reading supports from pre-kindergarten through high school which enables to students to receive help in the appropriate skill deficit regardless of grade. The handbook will also provide a one-stop professional development for general educators on the definitions and characteristics of reading difficulties, dyslexia, and dysgraphia.

As the Co-Chair of SECAC in Howard County, I have worked with parents on their child's educational struggles and/or Individualized Education Plans. All 32 students I have been involved with since 2019 have had reading struggles. Thirty of those students are identified with an SLD in Reading/Dyslexia. While each student's IEP is different, one problem is obvious, the student, while making progress on their IEP goals, is not closing the achievement gap and unable to meet grade-level standards. Each school has its own culture, and the lack of specific guidelines regarding reading has caused inconsistency in identification, remediation, and what is a best practice for reading instruction. The Handbook bill will provide the much-needed outline for consistency and best practices involving literacy and reading instruction, interventions, accommodations, and even specially designed instruction for students identified with a Specific Learning Disability in Reading/Dyslexia.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an environment that students who struggle academically will have regressed and suffered a loss of learning. Students with reading struggles, disabilities, along with other vulnerable populations are doubly impacted as they cannot receive the in-person teaching so needed to make progress, and they are struggling to access the online instruction due to their circumstances. The passage of the Reading and

Dyslexia Handbook bill will offer direction in dealing with learning loss by providing guidance for screening protocols, evidence-based interventions, and specially designed instruction.

As a parent of three children with dyslexia who have been identified at three different times in their educational career, I have watched my children suffer both academically and emotionally. The emotional toil of not being able to read as well as their peers was equally devastating as the academic struggles. If having a handbook that aids educators in the identifying and intervening during the early years of education, then I ask the Delegates from the House Ways and Means Committee to pass House Bill 237, the Reading and Dyslexia Handbook Bill in order to support the local school systems in the endeavor of teaching reading to ALL children.