

DECODING DYSLEXIA MARYLAND



House Bill 475: Open Source Phonics Matching Grant Program Act

Senate Energy, Education, and the Environment Committee

Wednesday, March 26, 2024

SUPPORT

Written Testimony

On behalf of the Decoding Dyslexia Maryland, we extend our appreciation to Chairman Feldman and Committee members for the opportunity to submit these comments. Our members strongly support House Bill 475 and respectfully urge the committee to provide a favorable report.

We would also like to express our gratitude to Delegate Korman for his unwavering commitment to advocating for students with reading difficulties. This legislation addresses a critical need in our communities.

House Bill 475 aims to establish new avenues of support for caregivers as they navigate their child's journey learning to read. For the majority of students in Maryland, this journey is difficult because some school districts and schools use ineffective reading instruction; this contributes to the escalation of students needing reading interventions, tutoring, and special education.

Dyslexia, a neurobiological learning difference impacting reading and related academic skills, is highly prevalent and one of the largest student populations requiring special education. This is partly attributed to school districts' use of outdated reading instruction and materials. This bill provides a lifeline to caregivers to help their children or tutees learn to read.

HB 475 directly tackles these issues in the following ways:

1. **Provides families and caregivers with evidence-aligned resources:** Parents of struggling readers and students with dyslexia often seek guidance on how to help at



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home. House Bill 475 is an opportunity for caregivers to use evidence-aligned instructional materials, assessments, or reading practice books, free of charge.

Presently, there's a notable scarcity of accessible, free, at-home instructional materials for reading that can be adapted to meet each student's needs.

2. **Encourages growth of open-source initiatives:** This bill would grow open source initiatives and eliminate the cost barrier so tutors can more easily afford to work with students who need help learning to read.
3. **Empowers local communities:** Through funding open-source phonics endeavors, the legislation empowers local organizations to tailor resources to suit the specific needs of their communities. For instance, libraries could develop and disseminate customized materials tailored to their patrons' needs.

The Benefits:

- **Enhances reading proficiency:** Access to quality phonics materials equips struggling students with the tools to bolster their reading abilities, fostering confidence and academic achievement.
- **Empowers parents:** The bill affords parents access to complimentary resources, enabling them to actively engage in their children's educational journey and speak the same language as school personnel.
- **Alleviates financial strain:** Free, open-source materials alleviate the financial burden often associated with supporting struggling readers or dyslexic students at home.
- **Fosters community collaboration:** The legislation encourages collaboration among organizations, educators, and parents, fostering a more supportive learning network bridging the gap between home and school.

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In conclusion, we hope you will lend your support to House Bill 475. It represents a significant stride toward ensuring equitable access to resources for all children. Thank you for your time, and we eagerly anticipate a favorable committee report.

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Decoding Dyslexia Maryland (DDMD) is an unincorporated, grassroots network of parents, students and educators. Founded in 2012 by Laura Schultz and Lisa Blottenberger, DDMD has grown to over 2,000 members with 14 regional and local chapters. Our mission is to ensure access to effective reading instruction and interventions for all children who have difficulty learning to read.

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