



February 12, 2024

To: State of Maryland Legislators
Re: HB475 Support

My name is Dr. Ayanna Baccus, and I am submitting a letter of support for HB475.

Last May, I received a phone call from a friend and parent of two teen boys in Baltimore County. She had recently realized that her oldest son had a reading problem and wanted to find a tutor or program that would meet his needs. Her son was struggling to complete assignments and pass his classes. He had read aloud a passage for an assignment to her, stumbling and mispronouncing words and unable to state the meaning. She said, in that moment, she froze, acknowledging that her beautiful and talented child had made it to high school without learning how to read well. How had this happened? She said that he had stopped reading aloud in elementary school and that no one ever told her that he needed help with his reading. She contacted me for resources while waiting for a response from his school. Unfortunately, I did not know of many tutors or programs that focused on high school students. I shared what I had and encouraged her to contact the school again.

I am a certified reading specialist and Associate Clinical Professor in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. Reading and literacy instruction and materials are my areas of expertise. Each year, I lead the university's summer reading clinic where we provide supplemental reading instruction to children in the local community and prepare teachers to become school-based reading specialists. I receive emails and phone calls like the one described above throughout the year – concerned Maryland parents asking for help and tutoring for children with reading difficulties. Every summer, I share a short list of alternative tutors and resources with families as the university's summer program only accommodates a small number of children from the College Park community. Unfortunately, most families are unable to access these alternative resources due to the cost and expense associated with services. Help comes at a price.

Subsequently, parents who can afford tutoring costs are often unsuccessful in finding help too. Services may not be available in their community, materials may be outdated and ineffective, tutors may have full rosters, and tutoring times may conflict with parent work schedules. Schools are doing the best they can to provide quality instruction, but they are often only able to provide intensive support to a limited number of children who have documented disabilities in reading. They want to partner with families and communities just as university-based reading programs do, but we all need access to high-quality instructional resources for parents that are free and widely

available. We know that telling parents of children with reading difficulties that their children just need time and need to read more is inaccurate and insufficient. The research is clear - children need explicit, systematic instruction in early literacy skills, phonics, comprehension and vocabulary, and other areas.

The Open-Source Phonics Matching Grant Program meets this need by providing needed materials and lessons to children and families regardless of age, location, schedules, and costs. This program is long overdue. I strongly support this legislation and urgently call on state lawmakers to fulfill promises made to voters and parents to address educational needs and services in the state of Maryland.

Thank you,

/s/ Ayanna Baccus

Ayanna Baccus, Ph.D.
Associate Clinical Professor