

Oral Testimony of Katie Spurlock

To: House Ways and Means Committee

Subject: Open-Source Phonics Matching Grant Program Act (HB 475)

Position: Favorable

Thank you Madam Chair, Madam Vice Chair and Committee Members.

I am Katie Spurlock an advocate and the founder of Open Source Phonics.

Like other reading advocates in Maryland, I am thrilled to see the State Board's resolution on the Science of Reading. It focuses on the key components of getting reading right. One of those components is family and community engagement, and HB 475 will help with that.

As background, in the balanced literacy years, parents were misinformed about phonics. Even those of us with struggling readers were told that children will pick up phonics implicitly when exposed to enough print. Community engagement sessions are now needed to correct this and to explain what explicit instruction in phonics is all about. But a description is not enough. Families need access to tools so that they can see, understand, and practice phonics at home if they wish.

With the Science of Reading shift, more Maryland kids should be reading by 3rd grade, but we know that all kids are different. Just as some kids need more practice to master the multiplication facts, some kids need more practice with phonics before reading fluently. The cost of commercial intervention materials—often upwards of \$200—is a barrier for getting that practice, both in school and out of school. Parents who can afford to buy their own materials or hire tutors may do so. But parents without means are left out. This is inequitable and will hamper our progress.

Investing in open license materials is most cost-effective because these materials have a license that allows them to be customized, adapted, and updated.

HB 475 will attract nonprofits like mine to serve this need. New materials can target particular needs such as the needs of multilingual learners. These tools are too important to be scarce or rationed. Please act on this. Thank you.