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2020 Joint Legislative Elementary Education Hearing  
Tuesday, February 11, 2020

Our story is the story of many New York families I talk with regularly. We struggled for years to figure out why our daughter couldn't learn to read, and then we struggled for years to find that place or person that knew how to teach her to read the way she needed to learn. The statistics are dramatic and dire. Only forty-five percent of all children in New York are reading proficiently, and that percentage drops to fourteen percent for children with learning disabilities, of which dyslexia is the most common. Seventy percent of children who struggle to read in first grade, still struggle in eighth-grade. With early interventions and the right reading instruction, ninety-five percent of all children have the cognitive ability to become skilled readers!

As a result of my own efforts to find ways to help my daughter outside of the education system, Teach My Kid to Read was formed as a 501 (C)(3) nonprofit organization to focus on strategic widespread community literacy solutions. We provide parents, librarians, and anyone interested in literacy education with professional development and tools to help all children, including those with dyslexia, learn the foundational skills essential for all children to learn to read. We offer families and caregivers options when the school can't help, and the expense of tutors is out-of-the-question.

There are six bills introduced this session that strive to tackle ways to help more children at risk of reading issues get identified early and to require teachers to receive training in ways that benefit all children, especially children with dyslexia learn to read. For more children to get the help they need before they struggle, please support A.5259 (Simon)/S.4341 (Brooks), and A.8697 (Carroll). Children must be identified early when the instruction and interventions have the most impact, and before they miss critical instruction, and begin to lose pace with their peers. School districts are currently required to universally screen all children for at risk for not meeting grade-level expectations in reading. These same screeners can be analyzed to look for and identify the risk factors commonly found in dyslexic children. The same programs that work best for dyslexic children also prove successful for all struggling and beginner readers.

Unfortunately, some teacher education programs provide few opportunities for future teachers to learn the science of reading or receive training in evidence-based instructional strategies that adequately prepare teachers to teach reading, especially to struggling readers. To improve opportunities for teacher training and provide more options for more specialized interventions, we request support for S.2675 (Brooks), A.7210 (Carroll)/S.5608 (Jackson), and A. 6911 (Carroll), to provide our children with reading issues like dyslexia, which are not demonstrating progress in a traditional school setting, with the opportunity to access specialized schools that cater to children with reading issues like dyslexia.

Failing to address the issue of how to address and teach children with reading issues like dyslexia is a problem for students and costly for districts. In 2016-2017, New York City spent close to \$800 million on private school tuition for students with disabilities. City officials settled close to 4,000 lawsuits for

tuition reimbursement that year. These numbers do not include the families who place their children in private schools and then sue the school districts to reimburse tuition costs. In New York City, more than 4,500 families sued for tuition reimbursement in 2018 alone. A Dyslexia Taskforce, as specified in A.8786 (Carroll)/S.7093 (Hoylman), is an essential first step to address the complex issues facing all stakeholders striving to create more literacy solutions.

I am here to speak on behalf of all families, educators, and especially all the children whose lives have been irrevocably affected in the quest to learn to read. Children with dyslexia often feel deep frustration and embarrassment, which can lead to anxiety and withdrawal from social activities. One out of four Americans suffers from mental health issues each year. However, adults and young people with learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, are 46% more likely to attempt suicide. Those of us who started advocating for stronger policies for children with reading issues like dyslexia when our children were young now have older children with emotional and mental health issues based on the shame, anxiety, and stress of not learning to read.

The time to act is now. With New York City poised to implement sound, evidence-based literacy instruction, and support in early grades, it's time to take the next step and provide interventions and support for all students with reading issues like dyslexia who are unable to learn to read. But for this to happen, children with dyslexia must be identified, and interventions must be implemented as early as possible.

Let's take action. Quickly.

Marion Waldman  
Executive Director, Teach My Kid to Read  
PO Box 8314  
Albany, NY 12208  
518-369-2769  
[marion@teachmykidtoread.com](mailto:marion@teachmykidtoread.com)