

Tuesday, April 15, 2025

Dear Members of the House Committee,

I'm writing today not just as an educator, but as a mother whose life—and whose children's lives—were forever changed by dyslexia.

Despite my background as a first grade teacher, reading interventionist, and literacy coach, I didn't recognize the signs in my own children. My son had "taught himself to read" before kindergarten—or so I thought. In truth, he had memorized every word we ever read to him, night after night, as we read religiously. He could perform, but he couldn't decode. The current universal screener used in our schools, iReady, didn't flag him. It didn't flag my daughter either. Both of my children were missed.

I only began to suspect dyslexia after a casual conversation at a neighborhood bunco night. Another mom recognized the red flags I unknowingly shared and urged me to seek evaluation. That one conversation changed everything. I paid nearly \$2,000 out of pocket for a private evaluation in 4th grade 5 years ago—and through that diagnosis, we discovered a family history of undiagnosed dyslexia going back to not only my father but also my grandmother, who never made it past the 7th grade.

From there, I was faced with a choice: pay \$300 a week for 2 years of Dyslexia Therapy, or learn to do it myself (for half that cost). I chose the latter. I became a Certified Academic Language Therapist (CALT), dedicating nearly 1,000 hours of training so I could provide my children with the evidence-based intervention they needed. It cost less financially—but more than anything, it cost time, effort, and a complete shift in our family dynamic and my career path. Thankfully, my family's story has a happy ending, and I often joke with my son that his diagnosis helped me finally figure out what I want to be when I grow up!

Now, I work every day to ensure more students will read at grade level, no matter their home life or background or means. My kids had access to the resources they needed—but far too many don't. And we know how that story often ends: academic failure, long-term trauma, and even involvement in the criminal justice system.

In a recent role, my school principal allowed our literacy intervention team to screen all K–2 students in the building using DIBELS 8th - in addition to our READ Act required iReady Diagnostic. It was not uncommon to find students who scored "on grade level" in iReady but were flagged for *intensive intervention* on DIBELS. Without that additional screener, those students would have gone unnoticed and unsupported and would have fallen through the cracks.

Senate Bill 25-200 is about giving every student a chance—not just the ones whose parents have the means, the knowledge, or the lucky conversation at a neighborhood party. This bill is

about putting fences at the top of the cliff, not ambulances at the bottom. It's about using what we know—what the science of reading has taught us—to screen early, intervene early and change lives.

I urge you with all my heart: please vote YES on Senate Bill 25-200. Our children deserve to be seen. They deserve to be supported. They deserve to learn to read.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Traci Thorstenson, M.Ed., CALT
Douglas County, Colorado



April 15, 2025

**SB25 200 Dyslexia Screening and READ Act Requirements
SUPPORT**

Madame Chair and Members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Dr. Kathy Wilson. I represent the League of Women Voters of Colorado's 1,800 members from across the state regarding **SB 200**. As a nonpartisan organization the League encourages citizen participation in government through education and advocacy. We urge you to vote **YES on SB25 200**.

The foundation for League advocacy decisions are our studied Positions. The League believes the state legislature has the authority to establish base-level expectations in the areas of academic achievement to ensure consistency and equity across the state. We view the education of a young child as a shared responsibility among the state, the school, and the child's parents. Therefore, we support equalizing educational opportunity with programs for students with special needs such as dyslexia and literacy acquisition difficulties. SB25 200 will allow for the identification of students who demonstrate early reading and writing challenges to receive the supplemental instruction they need to achieve an expected level of literacy proficiency by the end of third grade.

Although the League is recommending a YES vote on SB25 200, we believe that to achieve an equalization of educational opportunity, school districts should be adequately compensated for the teacher professional development that will be needed to administer and interpret the universal screener for dyslexia indicated in this bill. Without this funding, the General Assembly is creating an unfunded mandate.

I taught at a K-8 school for students with dyslexia in California for 10 years. I then joined the Education faculty at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, where I was a Founding Director at the Schmoker Reading Center. During my tenure I taught undergraduate and graduate level literacy courses and mentored teachers in identifying K-12 students'

literacy deficits and addressing those deficits through focused instruction. I know well what teachers will need to be successful with students who have dyslexia.

SB25 200 is a much-needed positive step forward. The League of Women Voters urges you to vote YES on SB 25 200.

Respectfully,
Kathy Wilson, Ph.D.
lwvkathy@gmail.com
League of Women Voters of Colorado

Hello, my name is Jamie Dodero, and my son is a third-grade student at Brantner Elementary school in the 27J School District.

When my son was just six months old, he suffered a Traumatic Brain Injury at the hands of an in-home daycare. He suffered a Subdural Hematoma by being shaken by the daycare provider and was inpatient at Children's Hospital in Aurora for 4 days in August of 2016.

My son has been at the same school since he was in Kindergarten (fall of 2021) and has continued to test well below and below grade level in the areas of reading. He was denied an IEP in April 2024, so I got outside testing done in July from Children's Hospital, that did in fact, confirm that he has Dyslexia and ADD. I have asked the school for help for him and he was denied for an IEP for the second time in the fall of 2024. He has now been approved for a 504 as his teacher is providing several in class accommodations for him.

I am coming to you today to ask that you all take a serious look at the education that you are providing to the students that learn differently. I have spent well over \$8,000 to have an in-home tutor come every week since February of 2023 that specializes in the Orton Gillingham method for Dyslexia, just to make sure that my son is keeping up with the students in his grade. I feel that this is a discrimination because my family can afford to do this and I refuse to let him fail. Because of the additional instruction he is receiving, he has been able to keep up and so his testing percentages do not show that he needs additional assistance although he is below grade level on all but one of his most recent DIBELS scores. After a detailed evaluation from a Neuropsychologist, I was told that if my son had not been receiving this additional assistance outside of the classroom, that he would most likely not be reading at all.

This process has been horrendous and I have felt unheard, unseen and invalidated. I will continue to advocate for my child as I know what is best for him, but I would appreciate another look at how the system works. In my opinion, the lack of communication, assistance and resources provided to the students and parents that are trying to better their children's education is not ok. I have also expressed my experience with the principal of the school, the other faculty at the school and the 27J District during a board meeting in October of 2024. I wanted to bring this issue to a boarder audience in hopes that the processes and protocols will be diligently re-evaluated. We owe that much to these students.

Thank you for your time.

Dear House Education Committee,

My name is Dr. Emily Anderson Elder, and I reside in Windsor, CO. I am a family medicine physician, a board member of Bridging the Gaps Dyslexia Center in Greeley and a mother to a dyslexic reader. I am asking the committee to consider approving Senate Bill 25-200 to implement universal dyslexia screening as soon as possible and not delay another three to four years.

Two years ago, my son, Luke, was in first grade and was struggling to read. We were told by his public school that he did not qualify for screening or any resources. They told us to “read more with him”...to essentially try harder. One night, I was reading to Luke, and he was getting frustrated as he often did. I told him, “We just need to read more...you just need to try harder.” Luke then looked at me with these big tears in his eyes and said, “Mommy, I am trying harder.” I knew he was right.

We sought private dyslexia screening, and a few weeks later, Luke was indeed identified as a dyslexic reader. We proceeded with private intervention, and it was amazing what Luke learned to do! It is amazing what early specific Orton-Gillingham intervention can do for a dyslexic mind... how fast they can learn and gain ground.

But, I am concerned because I saw what happened in the six months when he wasn't identified. Luke knew he was different. He frequently said he was stupid. His self-esteem went downhill, and he lost his love for learning. I wonder how many other kids are like Luke. We actually know how many other kids are out there, feeling the same way, yet we continue to let years go by. I can't imagine what years would have looked like for Luke.

In medicine, prevention is key. If we can intervene early, we can stop a disease from progressing, but we have to know it exists first. For example, we have accurate diabetes screening, and know it affects greater than 20% of our population. Unarguably, it would be neglect on my part to choose not to use the screening because of time or finances. Yet, we have done this with education. This neglect in dyslexia screening may not be causing a physical ailment for a child, but the mental impact is huge.

Please see these kids...they are not just statistics. They are kids, who in their early elementary years are learning who they are. Those feelings of self doubt, unintelligence, and poor confidence can last their lifetime and lead to depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and misconduct. As a physician, I have seen it.

I envy you as a committee. You can make one decision and have it impact and benefit thousands of kids all at once. I crave that as a physician... where I could make one decision and help thousands of patients at one time. You have that power, and I am urging you to use it.

Thank you for your consideration in passing this bill.
Sincerely, Dr. Emily Anderson Elder MD

Testimony in Support of the Dyslexia Bill 25-200

Good Afternoon, distinguished members of the committee. My name is Mollie Gilligan, I'm a local business owner, an involved member of our community and as a passionate mother advocating for my 10 year old daughter, who has struggled with dyslexia. I stand before you to urge you to pass bill **Senate Bill 25-200** because, as a family, we have lived through the heartache of watching my daughter struggle without the support she needed—and it's a journey I never want another child or family to experience. Nor should they have to.

When my daughter entered school, we never imagined that she would face the challenges of dyslexia. Like any parent, we expected her to thrive, to develop a love for learning, and to succeed in the classroom. But year after year, I watched her fall behind her peers, unable to grasp reading and writing as easily as the other children. The frustration, the tears, the self-doubt—every day felt like an uphill battle. It became painfully clear that something was wrong, but we couldn't quite figure out what it was. She seemed so bright, and had an amazing vocabulary, what were we missing.

My daughter's struggles were not identified early. The system didn't recognize the signs of dyslexia until **second grade**—a full two plus years after she started school. It was almost as if the school wouldn't say she had dyslexia and they told us they could not diagnose it, that we would have to do that on our own. Two years of watching her fight to keep up, feeling discouraged, and falling further and further behind. By the time we finally got the diagnosis, my daughter had already begun to internalize feelings of inadequacy and failure. As a family, we felt completely powerless, unable to help her navigate a world that seemed to leave her behind at every turn.

But even after we finally had an answer, the road to getting help was anything but clear. The special education teacher gave me a single website with a list of tutors in our area—no guidance, no recommendations, just a list. I called **10 different tutors**, hoping for some clarity, and only **three** responded. Of those three, we interviewed just one, the other 2 had no openings. We signed up for her services, but it felt like we were in the dark—completely unsure of whether this was the right fit or what exactly my daughter needed.

We had no roadmap. We were left to figure it out ourselves, with no clear direction or support from the educational system. The resources available to us felt scattered and inaccessible, and we were left wondering how many other families were facing the same confusion and frustration. If 1 and 5 children have some degree of dyslexia, why are there no answers? We felt like we were failing as parents and knew we would not give up.

What if there had been early identification and a coordinated plan in place? What if my daughter had received the right kind of help from the start, so she wouldn't have had to

endure two years of confusion, frustration, and self-doubt? What if we had been given the proper tools and resources to support her from the beginning?

What is even more devastating is knowing that **if dyslexia had been identified earlier**, my daughter wouldn't have had to endure those years of struggle and pain. Early intervention could have made all the difference in her academic journey—and in her emotional well-being. **Our family could have been spared the years of confusion and frustration that we faced.**

This bill is not just about providing resources for children with dyslexia—it's about **ensuring that no other child has to endure what my daughter went through.** It's about early identification, support, and resources that can make all the difference. It's about preventing families from feeling lost, from having to navigate a confusing maze of unhelpful websites and scattered resources.

But, in order for children like my daughter to succeed, we need a system that recognizes dyslexia early and provides **timely, targeted support.** We need teachers who are trained to spot the signs of dyslexia and families who are equipped with the knowledge and resources to help their children. My daughter deserves to reach her full potential, and every child struggling with dyslexia deserves the same opportunity.

This bill will make sure that no other family has to struggle like we did. It will ensure that children with dyslexia are identified and supported early—before they are left feeling broken, before their self-esteem is damaged, and before they start to believe they are not enough.

I ask you to pass this bill—not just for my daughter, but for all the children who are suffering in silence right now. **Let's make sure that no child has to wait until second grade—or any later—to receive the help they need.**

Thank you,

Mollie Gilligan

TESTIMONY ON
[SB25-200 Dyslexia Screening and READ Act Requirements](#)

Madam Chair, Members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is Sarah Robirds, and I am Colorado PTA's Legislative Engagement Committee Chair. I am proud to be a part of the nation's oldest and largest child advocacy association. The mission of PTA is to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

Colorado PTA strongly urges support for SB25-200. This bill is of particular importance to me as I have experienced firsthand the difficulty and joy of raising a child with dyslexia. Rather than share my perspective, I would like to share what my daughter wrote when she heard there would be a chance to testify in support of this bill:

Hello, my name is Eleanor Hazlett. I am an 8th grader at Oberon Middle School in Arvada, Colorado. I found out I was dyslexic when I was in 3rd grade.

I am writing in support of SB25-200. I think it is important to get all kids screened for dyslexia at school because some families can not pay for a screening on their own.

How I think this would have made my life easier or better:

My life would have been 100 times easier if my family and I had known sooner about my dyslexia. I would have been set up with the right 504 plan. I would have been so much better at reading and I wouldn't have fallen behind so much in reading and writing.

What it would mean for other kids:

What this means for both parents and kids is that they don't have to spend a bunch of money on their kids' education. If kids get screened now at a young age they will have much better support from teachers, staff members, and family which would make their education much easier and smoother.

I don't want kids to feel the way I did. I don't want them to be afraid to read in front of the class because they are slow readers or can't read the words on the page. I want them to feel confident and see dyslexia as their super power just as I do now.

This bill has the potential to give families, students, and teachers the information they need to effectively address dyslexia from the beginning which eliminates much of the stress and heartbreak associated with an undiagnosed learning difference. Not only will everyone have the information they need to move forward, this bill strengthens the partnership between families and schools so they can work collaboratively to help all students succeed.

Thank you for your time and thank you to the bill sponsors for prioritizing this important issue.

PTA's Basis for Position:

◇ [Colorado PTA Legislative Priorities — Equity](#)

◇ [Colorado PTA Legislative Platform — Equity & Public Education](#)

◇ [National PTA's Position Statement on The Education of Students with Disabilities](#)

□ *See* [HB19-1134](#) Identification and Interventions for Students with Dyslexia COPTA supported at a level 2.

See [SB23-181](#) Dyslexia Screening in Schools COPTA supported at a level 1.