

**Testimony for the Senate Committee on Education  
In support of SB 612  
March 17, 2015**

**Jennifer Cappalonga, M.Ed.  
Parent, Educator  
cappjen@comcast.net**

Good afternoon, Chair Roblan and members of the committee. My name is Jennifer Cappalonga. I am a parent, educator, and member of Decoding Dyslexia Oregon. I am here to testify in support of SB 612.

We have all heard the term dyslexia, so it is shocking to most when they begin to realize that as a state, we have no real strategy to address this learning difference. What the National Institutes of Health tells us in replicated, longitudinal, independent studies is that dyslexia affects one in five. That is 20% of the population.<sup>1</sup> In terms of Oregon's K-12 students, that is roughly 113,000 students.

At Decoding Dyslexia Oregon we receive emails and/or give advice to families from Bend to Burns, from Talent to Tigard to Tillamook and from Portland to Pendleton. There isn't an area of our state that escapes the repercussions of dyslexia, a neurological learning difference which has a strong genetic component. Affluent families who live in viable proximity to trained tutors provide evidence-based interventions for their children while others families cannot. This is an equity issue.

We have heard from families who are shocked and saddened that today's schools are no more adequately able to address services for their grandchildren than they were for the grandparents, two generations earlier. Because the state of Oregon has no real strategy to address the needs of these bright and capable learners, information about dyslexia identification and intervention is almost entirely absent from our teacher education programs. The result is that our teachers are not able to identify and effectively teach 20% of their students. This is true despite the fact that screening is easily implemented and our teachers want the tools to be able to teach all of their students. Recently both Portland and Salem Keizer public schools have begun offering in-service on dyslexia to their teachers. After a 3.5 hour in-service, nearly 100% of the 170 teachers stated that they think that the information is necessary for all teachers. And nearly 100% wanted even more training on dyslexia.

As a regular education science teacher with special education credentials, I had hundreds of students who displayed all the red flags of dyslexia. Most importantly, they could not read and write at a level to enable them to succeed in high school. As a teacher, I was not prepared to instruct them on this. It was heartbreaking to watch them fall through the cracks. **I support SB 612 because screening children for indicators of dyslexia is a critical first step to providing them with a free appropriate public education.**

As a parent of a child with dyslexia it was maddening that I did not have the training to teach my child to read and write. And although I teach a class titled "Special Education for General Education Teachers" I have not been able to compel his school to provide the free appropriate public education that he is entitled to. Instead, we pay for private tutoring. I am pleased to report that he now meets and exceeds the benchmarks

I am not alone in my lack of training. According to the National Institute of Child Health Development, "Many teachers have not had the opportunity to develop basic knowledge about the structure of the English language, reading development, and the nature of reading difficulties. Major efforts must be undertaken to ensure that colleges of education develop preparation programs to foster the necessary content and pedagogical expertise at both preservice and inservice levels."<sup>1</sup> This statement is as true in Oregon as it is nationally. **I support SB 612 because it addresses the need for teacher training at both the preservice and inservice level.**

Today we will hear from legislators, students, teachers, parents, community organizations and other professionals. Dyslexia touches many. We will get a picture of how it feels to be in a system 30 hours a week for 13 years that does not understand educational needs. Families will speak about the devastating effects that this has on their families. Teachers will speak about the need for training and intervention techniques so that they can teach all their students. And we have professionals to speak about the tremendous societal costs of ignoring the learning needs of 20% of the population.

Thank you.

Jennifer Cappalonga

<sup>1</sup>The NICHD Research Program in Reading, Reading Disorders and Reading Instruction: A Summary of Research Findings. Keys to Successful Learning: A National Summit on Research in Learning Disabilities.