

Kelly Arnold
15862 SW Bristlecone Way
Tigard, OR 97223
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Senate Education Hearing Committee

Dear Honorable Senators,

Sirens blaring, paramedics working on my son and me chanting over and over, “please don’t let him die.” How is this relevant to Senate Bill 612? It has everything to do with it.

My son suffered a cardiac arrhythmia due to the stress of class finals, because according to the district lawyer, he “was not ‘failing’ enough” to qualify for accommodations. For us, this was the end of a three year journey to get my son accommodations for his dyslexia. After his cardiologist wrote a letter, along with the psychologist report we had initially provided, the school finally gave Kaden the accommodations that he felt would help him learn and prove his knowledge. What crazy things had we been asking for that it took all of this to receive? Extra time and a quiet place to test. That is was all that we wanted. It didn’t seem like too much to ask for a child who was severely dyslexic and had significant ADHD.

You might think this is an example of just one child who fell through the cracks, but unfortunately, it is not. In my professional practice as a Dyslexia Specialist, almost all of my students have secondary conditions; from anxiety and low self-esteem, to depression or behavior problems. One of my students, who is severely dyslexic, was even suicidal. He was in the 3rd grade. Another student had plucked out all of his eye-lashes because of a school system that says the dyslexic learning style doesn’t even exist or that they do not have to recognize it because education law in Oregon does not recognize it.

Senate Bill 612 will change that. Even just the recognition of dyslexia, the acknowledgement that they are struggling because of dyslexia and not because they are stupid, would change SO much for these children. Teachers knowing what the warning signs are and special education teachers teaching them in a way that works for their brains would change everything. That is what these children need.

Teachers are amazing people, but most do not understand dyslexia. Even the learning specialist with their reading endorsements do not understand it. After a talk I gave at a local school, the reading specialist stood up and said that she had been a reading specialist for 30 years and until that night, she had thought dyslexia was only mixing up their Bs and Ds. In my post-graduate coursework for dyslexia, teachers and learning specialist literally would cry when they realized that so many of the students that they thought were not trying hard enough, or didn’t know how to help, were actually dyslexic.

People with dyslexia struggle with print, reading or writing, but they have so many strengths. They are gifted in art, people skills, creativity, and seeing the “big picture”. We need these people in our society. We need them to get the education they deserve, to have their self-esteem kept intact, and for them to thrive.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 612.

Kelly Arnold