

## Testimony in Support of House Bill 1231

Justine Gibbon, Kindred Elementary Title 1 Reading Teacher

Good morning, Chair Elkin and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Justine Gibbon, and I am a Title 1 Reading Specialist at Kindred Elementary in Kindred, North Dakota. Our district is part of the Southeast Consortium Dyslexia pilot program. The Southeast Consortium is made up of five districts: Kindred, Northern Cass, Enderlin, Lisbon, and Richland. For the past four years, I have had the opportunity to be part of this consortium as we research, develop, and implement dyslexia screening and intervention procedures for our districts. I am testifying today in support of House Bill 1231, which will enable educators to screen for dyslexic characteristics and quickly place these students into an intervention that targets dyslexic-specific deficits, such as phonemic awareness.

North Dakota has made large strides in educating teachers about best practices in reading instruction. The new requirements for all K-3 teachers to receive professional development in science of reading has been a huge lift for the dyslexic community, because the instruction that is necessary for dyslexic learners is the science of reading come to life. However, it's not enough to just train teachers about best practices in reading instruction. North Dakota students need teachers who are trained in reading instruction AND students need to be screened for dyslexia. It's not one or the other. We need both, because it is absolutely necessary to teach all learners to read.

Let me give you an example of why screening for dyslexia is critical for our school systems and our children. When a parent brings a child into the walk-in clinic with a fever, the pediatrician would not prescribe amoxicillin without first investigating further into the problem. We can easily apply the same methodology to our schools. North Dakota schools need a process for investigating beyond universal screener in order understand why a student does not reach benchmark and how to help these learners. Our piloted dyslexia screening process provided diagnostic information needed to place students into the right intervention.

Districts may have some type of benchmark testing system already in place to assess student learning, as would be required through this bill. For our dyslexia screening process, we utilized our current benchmarking systems already in place such as AIMSweb and FASTbridge, we just learned how to use our data more effectively. All students identified with dyslexic characteristics then benefited from the intensive, systematic instruction that our intervention provided.

The word dyslexia should not be viewed as intimidating or too specific because dyslexic learners are in every classroom. Dyslexia is a spectrum disorder, so students with dyslexia can be mildly dyslexic or profoundly dyslexic or somewhere in the middle. Students on the more profound side may be students who qualify for special education services. Dyslexia is a very common reading deficit and is not dependent on intelligence, gender, race, or social economic status. This is why learning about dyslexia is so important for North Dakota educators. A student with dyslexia can fall anywhere on the spectrum and therefore anywhere in the school system; meaning they can be in need of intervention, at grade-level, or gifted and talented. Learning more about the word dyslexia helps schools "prescribe" the right intervention. By using the word dyslexia, we know more about the student and how to help them.

If you took a tour in our schools today, you would see teachers actively screening students for dyslexic characteristics, identifying students in need of intervention, and instructional methods using explicit, systematic instruction. The dyslexia pilot program has made an immensely positive impact on our schools, but our consortium consists of five small districts in the vast state of North Dakota. For all the reasons I listed above, I support HB 1231 and recommend applying this screening process statewide.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer a small change in the wording of this bill. On behalf of our dyslexia pilot consortium, we would suggest removing the word "spelling" from Section 2 Line 16 and replace it with the words "word reading." This particular reading skill and specific phrasing would match the benchmarking process most universal screening tools offer such as AIMSweb, Fastbridge, and DIBELS.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 1231.