

KATIE FRY HESTER
Legislative District 9
Carroll and Howard Counties

Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs Committee

Chair, Joint Committee on
Cybersecurity, Information Technology
and Biotechnology



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 3rd, 2020

Sponsor Testimony in Favor of Senate Bill 575 - Early Literacy and Dyslexia Practices - Guidance and Assistance

Position: Favorable with Amendments

Chairman Pinsky, Vice chair Kagan, members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs committee:

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 575. This bill creates a stakeholder advisory group, including educators and members of the dyslexia community, to collaborate on the creation of a Reading and Dyslexia Handbook. This would provide a potent, evidence based resource for parents, teachers, and local school systems to help children with dyslexia and reading difficulties succeed throughout their educational careers. The Handbook would include:

1. Best practices for reading screening, instruction, identification of reading difficulties, dyslexia assessment, and interventions;
2. Definitions, indicators, and characteristics of reading difficulties;
3. Tools and materials to support teachers and parents in addressing students with dyslexia and reading disorders;

This bill would also require the designation of a dyslexia liaison at MSDE to facilitate technical assistance to local school systems in implementing the practices outlined in the Reading and Dyslexia Handbook.

Research has shown that effective early intervention can be the key to closing the educational gaps experienced by children with dyslexia and reading difficulties. This is due to the fact that many reading disorders and deficits find their biological basis in unique structural differences in

the brains of children. However, at a young age, the brain is highly plastic and will adapt to the right sets of trainings and practices - so much so that a 2014 meta-analysis showed that up to 70 percent of at-risk children who receive educational intervention in kindergarten or first grade went on to become entirely proficient readers. This handbook will make sure that these best practices are based on sound scientific evidence, and are simultaneously informed by the real world experience of teachers and advocates who have spent countless hours of their professional and personal lives on this important issue. It will also make this information more accessible to educators, parents, and other community members coming into contact with children with reading difficulties, allowing important interventions to reach these children earlier in life.

Included with this bill you will find a number of sponsor amendments that have been worked out with the advocates and appropriate stakeholder groups. They would:

1. Make more explicit the specific members of the stakeholder advisory group;
2. Alter the requirement that the handbook include an enumeration of recommended programs, instead requiring the enumeration of tools and scientifically backed component checklists or rubrics - acknowledging the difficulties in enumerating a rapidly changing set of programs;
3. Clarify that MSDE is not required to hire a new person to serve as the Dyslexia Liaison, and may instead appoint a pre-existing employee;
4. Make technical and clarifying changes to conform this bill to the version passed by the House last week;

This bill is supported by the Maryland Psychological Association and the Maryland School Psychologist with the included friendly amendments, and was a recommendation of the Maryland Dyslexia Task Force. It also follows a model laid out by 23 other states, including Texas, California, and New Jersey, bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders to create a comprehensive resource on reading and dyslexia. **For that reason, I respectfully request a favorable report for SB575.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Fry Hester". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senator Katie Fry Hester
Howard and Carroll Counties