



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
MASSACHUSETTS SENATE

**SENATOR JASON M. LEWIS**

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*Chairman*  
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH  

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March 3, 2016

The Honorable Sonia Chang-Diaz  
Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Education  
State House, Room 111  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Alice Hanlon Peisch  
House Chair, Joint Committee on Education  
State House, Room 473G  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chair Chang-Diaz and Chair Peisch:

Please accept this correspondence as my testimony in support of Senate Bill 312, *An Act to address the special education needs of children with dyslexia* and House Bill 463, *An Act relative to providing screening for dyslexia*.

Dyslexia is the most common neurological disorder affecting the acquisition of decoding and encoding skills and hindering the literacy development for people of all ages. Historically, dyslexia prevalence rates were an estimated 10 to 15 percent of all U.S. school children. Consistent and targeted early interventions are proven to mitigate the effects of dyslexia and improve individual outcomes.

Many schools do not characterize students who fit the criteria for dyslexia as having the disorder. Instead, schools and clinical personnel use terms such as specific learning disability (SLD). In the 2013-14 academic year, 43,432 or 26.4 percent of Massachusetts students with disabilities were designated with the primary disability of SLD. Due to the inconsistency of terminology and lack of a clear definition of dyslexia from other learning disorders, general intervention strategies and accommodations may not fit the needs of students with dyslexia. This legislation addresses the needs of dyslexic students by defining dyslexia clearly for clinical and education use and thereby raising public awareness for the disorder.

Massachusetts law currently waives standardized college entrance exams for students with dyslexia. This legislation will increase understanding and support for individuals with dyslexia as well as require an early screening for students in schools. The Senate bill also secures services for children through coursework and field experience for licensed general and special education teachers. The training and resources will help teachers form provisions of interventions and accommodations for students with dyslexia.

I respectfully request the Committee to release favorably as soon as possible. Please do not hesitate to contact my office should you require any further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jason M. Lewis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jason M. Lewis