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RE: HOUSE BILL 7164 (Oppose to Amend, Yes to only Extend)

House Health, Education & Wellness Committee Members:

I have come before this Health, Education and Wellness Committee since 2014, with one express purpose that is to ensure equity and teaching methods are not discriminatory. Keeping their emotional, social and physical health protected with solid bills as we have previously passed.

House Bill 7164 is perplexing. I do say Yes to Extend, and NO to amend. Given Covid and the burden we listened to our teachers, and agree. However, either way as to the amendments and what AFT blasted out in support to their members. One of which is a teacher whom has worked with us and is terrified that this bill will tear apart the groundbreaking work we all did to pass R2R in 2019. I am still proud of that bill. Clearly AFT is intentionally trying to manipulate or just doesn't have expert knowledge in understanding why it's so wrong. There is enough expert testimony in opposition of these harmful changes by others that I will conclude with a personal story.

My son was at Glen Hills Elementary School at 10 years old reading at an emerging 1st grader. The Reading Specialist, Mrs. Kraus had her Master's, and took him for years in small group pull-outs. My son made no progress since entering school and did not receive the systematic structured literacy with explicit instruction at all! She was never taught, and therefore my child never learned. She eventually apologized to me, although that was of no consequence and I was angry then, but now I understand that seemingly being tenured as having a degree and/or many years in the field doesn't mean you have had this training and it would have been unusual to receive prior to one year ago. I do have a better understanding, and today Decoding Dyslexia is all about 'flipping it' in these instances and giving others a further education on why it's not working, and what can be done.

Fast forward for the last 7 years I have spoken to parents and teachers, along with attending hundreds of meetings and there is a common thread which Emily Hanford brought out because of this lack of knowledge and acceptance that teachers are less prepared than we thought.

Would you want a medical doctor to take a weekend crash course online vs. a year of intensive learning for the same certificate? Who would you trust to be best qualified?

We passed an ironclad, top-notch bill that RIDE ran with and has done an incredible amount of work and teachers and parents are abuzz and excited that they now get it and can actually teach the methods necessary.

Where is the obligation to our kids and not shortchanging them! I implore you to uphold the current R2R law. Every part of that bill was scrutinized, and data, research, expert collaboration all resulted in an amazing resolution – yet now this is arbitrarily being changed because perhaps the seasoned Superintendents Association, AFT etc. thinks otherwise. Has any of them taken the courses to be certified in R2R? Well, they had their opportunity to prevent why they feel their opinions are best over experts that spoke, this is not the time to crumble down what was passed...for who's gain....not our RI children. Again, remember that 70% of the education system still believes in balanced literacy and that typically is, is not systematic, explicit instruction as R2R Bill clarifies. To do otherwise will only continue to ensure kids challenged in reading will continue to be thrown under the bus versus riding it.

A teacher who has a master's degree prior to last year and is either teaching at a college level or to grade schools IS NOT QUALIFIED to teach the explicit systematic structured literacy because it wasn't being taught. This is not about being hurtful to teachers, this is about correcting educators on what they believe to be. Listen to Dr. Susan Brady or hear from RIC and URI that are running these programs now that teach our new teachers with what was missing to help our lost kids.

Yes to Extend, and NO to amend.

With gratitude,

Suzanne Arena

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> Author / Advocate / Survivor

My new Book: 'Dyslexia and the Journalist, Battling a Silent Disability'

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