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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMITTEE ON
STATE AND FEDERAL LEGISLATION**

Oversight: New Phonics Based Curriculum and Dyslexia Screening in NYC Public Schools
December 14, 2023

Thank you Chair Joseph and Chair Abreu for holding this important hearing and for giving me the opportunity to testify before you and the members of the Education and State and Federal Legislation Committees. My name is Robert Carroll, and I represent the 44th Assembly District in the New York State Assembly.

As a person with dyslexia who had the extraordinary benefit of being diagnosed when I was six years old and given the instruction and supports needed to be academically successful, I know first-hand how much of a difference evidence-based reading interventions can make. Dyslexia is sometimes used as a catch-all phrase to describe those who have trouble reading, but it is important to be more specific. Dyslexia is a learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. Studies have shown that as many as one in five children have dyslexia or another phonemic awareness issue and educational research has unequivocally demonstrated that early identification coupled with intervention and multisensory sequential phonics instruction drastically improves educational outcomes. Unfortunately, there has been no coherent statewide approach to identifying and addressing the needs of such students.

This is an issue I have been working on since taking office in 2017. I have come to conclude that students with dyslexia are what could be called “the canary in the coal mine.” New York State is in fact facing a broader literacy crisis with seventy percent of fourth graders not reading at grade level according to the results of the federal National Assessment of Educational Progress for 2022, due in part

to the failure to adopt curriculum based on the science of reading for both students with characteristics of dyslexia and the general population. We must do a much better job of teaching all our students to be fluent readers while at the same time address the special needs of students with dyslexia and related challenges. These students require early and intensive interventions provided over several years to remediate their phonological awareness issues.

I believe Mayor Adams and Chancellor Banks are to be commended for the work undertaken with regards to dyslexia screening and the overhauling of the City's approach to teaching literacy in the elementary grades. I have been proud to partner with the DOE on dyslexia screening and structured literacy programming for schools in my district. My strongly held view is that in addition to the City's efforts, state legislation is necessary. In that regard I have introduced the following four bills:

The "Dyslexia Task Force Act" (A.133/S.2599) will require the New York State Education Department Commissioner to establish a task force to hold public hearings and examine appropriate and effective evidence-based screening methods, reading interventions and other educational supports for dyslexia and related disorders. This legislation passed both houses this session and I am hopeful it will be signed by the Governor soon.

The Dyslexia Diagnosis Access Act (A.2898/S5481) would mandate that private health insurance policies pay for neuropsychological exams for the purpose of diagnosing dyslexia. Such exams may cost in excess of six thousand dollars and are typically not paid for by health insurance, making them unaffordable to most families. This bill passed the Assembly and we will be working with our Senate colleagues to see it pass both houses.

The NY IDEA ACT "New York Individuals with Dyslexia Education Act" (A.7101) would establish statewide standards for the screening of students in grades kindergarten through five for dyslexia, for the interventions required for students with dyslexia, for parental notification regarding the outcomes of screenings and interventions, and for the training of educators and other school personnel regarding dyslexia screening and interventions.

The Right to Read Act (A.2897/S5480) would require the State Education Department to provide guidance to school districts to establish literacy curricula based on the science of reading as the standard throughout the state, set standards for teacher training and professional development aligned with evidence-based curricula, and require the state to take a more active role in supporting and monitoring the progress districts are making in teaching reading.

It is my hope that working together we can truly transform education in this state. Reading is the foundation for success in school and we cannot continue to deny so many of our children the right to read. Thank you once again for your time.