

May 16, 2019

Hank Fien, Ph.D.
Director
National Center on Improving Literacy
1215 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403-1215

Dear Dr. Fien:

Thank you for your response to my letter to the U.S. Department of Education (Education), dated April 22, 2019, concerning the National Center on Improving Literacy's (NCIL) recent publication, "Screening for Dyslexia." Your response is appreciated; however, outstanding concerns remain.

As the author of the provision that funds your center, I feel a fiduciary responsibility to the American taxpayer to ensure the money is well spent. Unfortunately, when some people receive funding from the federal government to produce work on behalf of the taxpayer, they think, "it's good enough for government work." To me, when you receive money from the American taxpayer, that is when your work must be best. When information or recommendations are published with taxpayer funds and passed down from the federal government to state education agencies (SEA) and local education agencies (LEA), the content must be impartial and rooted in fact. This is especially the case with an issue like dyslexia, in which there is so much misinformation and a lack of awareness and understanding throughout SEAs and LEAs. It is paramount that schools, educators, policymakers, and parents are provided with current scientific evidence so that children with dyslexia are identified and given an evidence based education.

In your response to my letter to Secretary DeVos, you comment on my 'scathing rebuttal' of NCIL's finished product. To be clear, NCIL's work product was meant by the Secretary of Education to guide national public policy. NCIL takes responsibility for misquotes and phantom citations but ignores significant developments, such as the definition of dyslexia in federal law included in the First Step Act and the updated research from Drs. Sally and Bennett Shaywitz, which is significantly different from the older articles cited in NCIL's paper. As the Shaywitzes are among the leaders in the study of dyslexia and have developed a way to affordably and efficiently screen for dyslexia, this seems odd.

Instead of pointing to the significant development of a new federal definition and requirement to screen for dyslexia, you wish to convene a meeting to define dyslexia more to NCIL's liking. Failing to acknowledge a definition and requirement to screen in federal law is evidence of ignorance or NCIL's purposeful neglect and omission. This reinforces the critique that NCIL has an ideological view of dyslexia, which is advocated for at the expense of American taxpayers. There is no need to convene a meeting or conference because the ability to provide optimal

support for dyslexic children is not based on belief systems but on accurate, published scientific data.

There are ways to interpret such a poor work product being given to the Secretary of Education. Either you did not expect it to be released, you did not care what the product was, you did not recognize that it would be used to guide public policy, I could go on, but any of these call into question your ability to advise the Secretary on national policy. Ultimately, this is not a question of what the issues are; it is a question of whether someone has demonstrated the willingness to do the work necessary to give a balanced, thorough analysis of issues to be used in making these decisions about our children's future. If such a high profile document does not exhibit the level of concern that seems commensurate to the responsibility, it frankly makes me not trust your judgement in another segment.

I am disappointed that I have to write this letter. The American taxpayer deserves better and America's children deserve better.

Sincerely,

Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator

CC: Secretary Betsy DeVos