

Testimony of
Faith Sweeney
Before the Education Committee
SB 1094 An Act Concerning the Implementation of Reading Models or Programs
March 1, 2023

Good afternoon Representative Currey, Senator McCrory, and members of the Education Committee. I am Faith Sweeney, a literacy coach and 27-year teacher.

I want to highlight a few key points in support of the waiver provisions in SB 1094, which provides some flexibility in the Right to Read Act of 2021.

As an educator of 27 years and a former struggling reader, unless additional changes are made this unfunded Right to Read Act will continue to cause harm to the teaching profession and, most importantly, the students this mandate is designed to help.

As an NEA Teaching Fellow, I conduct 1 on 1 conversations with educators from across this state. Two common themes I am hearing are a lack of funding and a lack of resources. Yet the state is imposing another unfunded mandate that puts more pressure on districts, administrators, and educators. Not only are districts spending millions of dollars to purchase programs--some of these programs charge up to 100 dollars in yearly fees per child for the implementation of these programs.

This Right to Read Act doesn't address each school district's unique needs. Instead, the options are a one-size-fits-all canned program. These options eliminate student choice and lack the vital components necessary to reach all students. For example, some "approved" programs have a 45-minute whole-class instruction model where students use their pointer finger to follow along as the teacher, or a computer, reads aloud. Imagine first graders sitting for 45 minutes using their pointer finger to track words they aren't even interested in reading. In addition, these programs will not reach all students because they are lacking in extending and challenging student thinking.

Major revisions need to be made during this waiver period to ensure that every school has the proper funding to supply every classroom with a robust library, relevant staff development, literacy coaches, literacy interventionists, and special education teachers, as well as time for early intervention.

The Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success and the Reading Leadership Implementation Council should work in collaboration with literacy coaches, literacy

interventionists, and special education teachers from across the state. The informed observations and lived experiences of teachers who are working directly with students daily could provide helpful insights into effective instructional strategies. We would welcome an opportunity to connect a diverse group of teachers and their experiences to this work.