

April 9, 2025

Mr. Chairman & Members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is J. Michael Squatrito, Jr. I am the President of the Association of Rhode Island Authors (ARIA) as well as the author of The Overlords Fantasy Book Series, a fictional epic fantasy tale. I am offering this testimony in support of H-5786.

Several years ago, the Rules Committee passed a tax exemption law for artists, including writers. As stated at the time, those authors who obtained a tax exemption certificate were not required to collect sales tax. This was a benefit to our authors not because sales tax did not need to be collected and reported, but that people would come to Rhode Island to purchase our literary works and hopefully buy other things while in the state. Today, this law is being amended to the point where nearly all authors cannot qualify for a tax exemption.

The current writing of the tax exemption states that “limited edition” artwork include fiction and non-fiction works. Furthermore, “limited edition” has been defined as works that are numbered and limited to 300 copies. Nowhere has it been stated where the number 300 came from, which seems to be picked arbitrarily without any consideration for actual number of sales per author on average.

Books are a form of artwork, just like sculpture, paintings, jewelry, and photography. However, our works of art differ greatly from the others. Where a fine painting or sculpture might fetch, for example, \$500, \$1000, or even \$5000, individual book sales range from \$10 to \$25. An artist could then create a limited run of prints, say 299, and charge an additional \$100 per print. All of these sales would be tax exempt, whereas author’s books are to collect tax on their works, which on average is well below those of other artists. It simply does not make sense and seems as if authors are being singled out.

We ask that writers receive equal treatment under RI General Law 44-18-30B. We also ask that legislators make tax exemption for all authors regardless how the work is published or how many are created, and our hope is that this is done in a timely manner. And finally, we ask that any rule or regulation that would exclude written works from the act be rejected.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "J. Michael Squatrito, Jr." The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

J. Michael Squatrito, Jr., President of ARIA

CC: Steven Brown, Executive Director, ACLU