

PVD

**AMNESTY
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Hon. Robert E. Craven, Chairperson, House Committee on the Judiciary
et al. Sitting Committee Members, Rhode Island General Assembly

Amnesty International USA Local Group 1016
ITEM: H7575
POSITION: SUPPORT

To The Esteemed Members of the House Committee on the Judiciary,

Thank you for considering House Bill 7575, which seeks to embellish our State's protections of professionals' ability to educate in libraries or public humanities, including in school libraries.

Amnesty International has fought since 1961 to protect human rights as the world's largest grassroots human rights organization. AIUSA has more than a million members and activists in all 50 states. Our members are part of a larger global movement of 10 million people in 150 countries. Our activism and research finds the facts, exposes what's happening, and rallies people together to force governments and others to respect everyone's human rights. AIUSA takes a decisively clear position on the rights of gay, lesbian, queer and trans people, and the right of GLBQT people to exist free from threats and to express diverse orientation and identities as inviolably as any other human right.

In a time where a small but organized group of voices seek to attack the rights of gay or trans people, especially families with children in these communities, **any signal that the state supports this protected class from bigotry is welcome.** Obviously, bigoted opinions are still opinions and anyone is allowed to hold or express them. However, it is currently the case that such bigoted opinions do seem to be motivating "slap" lawsuits and other legal or civil campaigns against public and school libraries or their professional staff. **Without a meaningful signal from the state that supports the role of librarians and public humanities professionals as educators for their service areas, these actions will continue.** In fact, financially burdening our institutions is one of the purposes of these campaigns. Another is to

make the position unattractive or unappealing to open minded professionals, who would feel under threat to pursue their calling and contribute to their field of work. By introducing barriers to hate campaigns such as H7575 would, our state will be standing up not just for the right of our GLBQT communities to exist, but also for a very socially important class of professionals.

Finally, **not only are these campaigns costly and negative for institutions, they can also spiral out of control and lead to actual violence** as was demonstrated during the “pizzagate” misinformation campaign in 2016. While the hoax was discredited, it nonetheless culminated in a mass shooting event. Let’s address this sooner than later.

Amnesty PVD strongly urges the committee to consider this bill favorably and pass it to the House floor for a full vote.