



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

Melody Drnach, Chair

March 21, 2024

The Honorable Representative Robert Craven
Chairperson, House Committee on Judiciary
Rhode Island House of Representatives
82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903

Re: House Bill 7575: Relating to Criminal Offenses – Obscene and Objectionable Publications

Dear Chair Craven and Committee Members:

The members of the Library Board of Rhode Island write to you to express our strong support for House Bill 7575 “Relating to Criminal Offenses - Obscene and Objectionable Publications and Shows.”

Libraries provide Rhode Islanders with a wealth of information, resources, learning opportunities, and a place to build community. Library staff see individuals from all walks of life making use of these valuable cultural centers. It is of the utmost importance that all residents of Rhode Island can see themselves reflected in the collections held by the libraries in our state. Library collections are intentionally inclusive of books and media that include topics of race, gender, and sexuality as they are reflective of the diversity that makes up the American fabric.

Unfortunately, we have seen library staff and educators across the country subjected to criminal prosecution and/or harassment for providing inclusive collections to their communities. A small but vocal minority of the population hopes to prevent collection of or remove materials from libraries that they believe to be objectionable. Highly educated professional staff in libraries, museums, schools, and colleges use collection development policies and guidelines that are approved and supported by their governing bodies when making decisions about what to include in library collections and why these specific materials are included.

It is imperative that the staff of libraries and educational institutions can perform their work without fear of harassment or criminal prosecution. Rhode Island is currently the only state in New England that does not have exemptions from prosecution for professionals such as librarians, teachers and museum educators related to developing the collections at their respective institutions. Forty-four states across the nation have laws in place that provide protection for this important work.

We thank the Rhode Island General Assembly for your unwavering commitment to our public libraries and the ongoing efforts to reinforce the principles put forth in our State Constitution. We respectfully request that you support H7575 to provide protections for librarians and educators to provide materials that represent all members of our diverse Rhode Island communities.

Respectfully,

Melody Drnach

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