

PVD

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL



Hon. Evan P. Shanley, Chairperson, House State Committee on Government and Elections
et al. sitting committee members of Rhode Island General Assembly

Amnesty International USA Local Group 1016

ITEM: H7386

POSITION: SUPPORT

To The Esteemed Members of the House State Committee on Government,

Thank you for considering House Bill 7386, which seeks to embellish our State's protections of intellectual freedom in publicly supported 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 trans people and the right of trans people to exist free from threats and to express divergent identities as inviolable as any other human right.

In a time where a small but organized group of voices seek to attack the rights of trans people, especially children and their families, 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. It is also the case that public libraries have collection development plans and reconsideration policies in place to sort through requests for and against materials in a consistent and transparent way. To quote the American Library Association's *Intellectual Freedom Manual*, "with such a broad spectrum of ideas and information available [in a public library], it is inevitable that people will occasionally encounter resources they believe to be inappropriate or offensive" (Garner & Magi, 2021). **Library policy is in place primarily to promote access to materials and the intellectual freedom for all users in a community to**

do so. This legislation would simply reduce the ability of bigots and their bigoted opinions to wage campaigns against communities and unduly influence the exercise of reconsideration policies by libraries. Professional librarians would remain able to hear complaints and expressions of concern from the public, while also remaining free to respond to and support the intellectual freedom of residents and members in their library's service area.

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