

To: House Committee on State Government and Elections
Cc: Rep. Jennifer Stewart, Rep. Christopher Blazejewski
Re: H7386
Date: February 28, 2024

My name is Cynthia Ragona, and I live at 253 George Street in Providence, Rhode Island. I'm asking the Committee to support H7386 and pass the bill to the House floor.

In the last few years, across the country and here in Rhode Island, a small but vocal minority has attempted to remove books from public library collections. More often than not, these challenges have been partisan in nature and target content—or persons—the challengers would prefer not to see. In voicing Rhode Island's support for "equitable access to information for all citizens" through its public libraries, H7386 would show that Rhode Island recognizes the power of information access for all its citizens, would avoid wasting public libraries' time and resources on acts of censorship, and would ensure that decisions about library collections remain in the hands of experts.

Rhode Island is required to provide financial support to public libraries under R.I. Gen. Laws § 29-6, and Rhode Islanders' tax money should be spent to represent its entire community. The individuals best qualified to make that determination are Rhode Island's public librarians, who have the expertise, education, and experience to do so. H7386 implicitly recognizes librarians' qualifications to manage public library collections suitable for their respective communities, using their professional judgment free of censorship due to "partisan or doctrinal disapproval."

Research shows that voters trust librarians to do this work. A recent survey by the American Library Association found that 90% of voters have a favorable opinion of librarians who work in public libraries.* When asked more specifically about the representation of books in their public library collections, 79% of voters say that libraries in their community do a good job of offering books that represent a variety of viewpoints.* Once they hear that librarians are trained not to impose their own thoughts and opinions on which ideas are right, but to make knowledge and ideas available so that people have the freedom to choose what to read, 83% of voters are even more likely to trust librarians.*

H7386 would expand Rhode Island's statement of policy about its public libraries to make it clear that the State values equal access to information for all its citizens. As E.J. Dionne Jr. said in a December 18, 2022 *Washington Post* column, "efforts to close the

minds of the next generation will not make its members stronger, more resilient, more intelligent or, for that matter, more moral.” We should seek to have every citizen more informed by a range of viewpoints. H7386 would support that, and I support H7386.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Ragona

*From a survey conducted by Hart Research Associates and North Star Opinion Research on behalf of the American Library Association, March 1 to 6, 2022.