

Regarding bill H7386: the Freedom to Read Act

I grew up in libraries. Somewhere in some attic is a folder with my “Monmouth to the Moon” sticker charts, where young readers were invited to chart their progress to the moon by affixing a rocket ship sticker for each book read. I made that journey several times each summer, with joy, looking forward to the Friday morning trips to the library with my mother and sister. We were allowed free reign to look for books to take home each week, and I recall fondly the librarian who discovered some of my early interests and fostered them by pointing out increasingly challenging books, leading me to love reading more and more.

That sense of possibility—the ability to wander and learn and discover as we spent an hour in the library—was the source of my desire to work in schools, to engage in research, to value intellectual inquiry and civil discourse. I learned to read texts by people whose views were different from my own—and often disagreed with mine—as a way of understanding the world. In libraries, I learned to change my mind, to let go of earlier ideas as I learned more and could refine my critical thinking. I can’t imagine having that full access to all available ideas limited because of fear of what exposure to some ideas or authors might mean.

Some people suggest that since most people have access to the internet in some form, that book bans affect only the buildings that house books. For those of us who read long form, for children for whom the library is the portal to all learning, it is imperative that we have the possibility of encountering the whole world in their local library. If we want to raise citizens who can tolerate—even embrace—the idea of conflicting ideas existing in the world and appreciate the ways that considering difference makes us stronger, then libraries must be free to include all literature, all voices. Library’s limitations may be budgetary, but their choices should not be limited by discord reflecting individuals’ preferences.

As an educator, I sometimes hear well-meaning assertions of support that teachers are heroes who can change the world. My vote would be for librarians who, in making the entire world available to all readers—bringing Monmouth to the moon—invite us to recognize our place in something bigger than us, even if we need only walk a few blocks to get to our local library. Librarians are true heroes, creating readers and thinkers and learners. Please keep our libraries safe from bans and limitations that prevent those who use them from fully benefitting and growing into thoughtful and well-informed citizens.

Thank you for considering my viewpoint,
Debbie Phipps
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