

Steven Sepe

From: Jennifer McGrath <jmcgrath@pawtucketlibrary.org>
Sent: Wednesday, February 28, 2024 8:45 PM
To: House State Government and Elections Committee
Cc: Rep. Stewart, Jennifer A.
Subject: In Support of H7386, The Freedom to Read Act

Jennifer McGrath
Pawtucket Public Library
2/27/2024

My name is Jennifer McGrath, and I'm the Teen/Reference Librarian at the Pawtucket Public Library. I am writing to you in support of H7386, The Freedom to Read Act.

As a Teen Librarian, and in my previous position at the Adams Memorial Library as a Youth Services Librarian, I have come into contact with members of the community who are opposed to or concerned about LGBTQIA+ books in public libraries. In Central Falls, a woman angrily asked me if I had books about 'trannies' in the Children's section. In Pawtucket, a man who was filling out Passport paperwork tried to pull all the 'gay' books off of my shelves to make a point about the library pushing an agenda. I also experienced a board member being concerned about my LGBTQIA+ Book Club because they thought I may tell trans youth how to acquire hormones. These are just a few examples, and I'm sure librarians who have been in the profession for longer than 3 years have plenty more stories to tell.

In all of these cases, I was concerned about the safety of marginalized youth in my spaces, and I worried that these adults may intimidate them out of the library. These books are purchased in part to educate youth about people different from them, but also for the kids who see themselves in these characters. Trans youth have better outcomes when there are adults and peers in their community who support them. Programs like Pride month displays, book clubs, movie nights, and more, give youth support and let them know they aren't alone. With stronger legislation to protect the freedom to read, librarians will have more confidence in book purchasing, as well as in programming.

Thank you for reading, and I hope that you will support the Freedom to Read in Rhode Island.

--
Jennifer McGrath

she/her

Teen/Reference Librarian

Pawtucket Public Library

13 Summer Street

Pawtucket, RI 02860

[401-725-3714 ext. 235](tel:401-725-3714)

www.pawtucketlibrary.org

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