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Testimony from Jocelyn Foye, executive director of The Womxn Project, in support of the Freedom to Read Bill (H7386)

I am writing in support of House Bill H7386, which states that it is the responsibility of government at all levels to protect the freedom to read and to support the right of free people to read freely, and that free public libraries provide equitable access to information for all citizens.

The Womxn Project is a 501c4 that works toward reproductive justice and freedom in Rhode Island. The movement we stand behind is partially based on ensuring people have access to unbiased educational materials so that they can make good decisions for themselves and their families, with no censorship on tools that inform them of that.

Librarians and educators have been called groomers, accused of indoctrinating people into a way of thinking when they're simply providing information. I find these attacks no more than a veiled form of censorship from a minority right-wing group, and believe it's imperative that these professionals be protected by law. Young people struggling with their identity can't always turn to their families for help out of fear of rejection. In fact, libraries "champion and defend the freedom to speak, the freedom to publish, and the freedom to read, as promised by the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States" (ALA, 2021).

People seeking information about their bodies and reproductive health can't always rely on their families to provide accurate information, but libraries can.

With this bill, Rhode Island libraries will be free to build collections that serve the entirety of their communities, without fear of reprisals from special interest or partisan groups. Please support this bill's passage which prohibits the removal of materials due to partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

Sincerely,
Jocelyn Foye
Executive Director
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