



State of Rhode Island Department of Administration
Office of Library & Information Services

One Capitol Hill, Providence, RI 02908
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February 29, 2024

The Honorable Representative Evan P. Shanley
Chairperson, House Committee on State Government and Elections
Rhode Island House of Representatives
82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903

Re: House Bill No. 7386 – State Aid to Libraries – Freedom to Read

Dear Chair Shanley:

Thank you for providing the Office of Library & Information Services (“OLIS”) within the Department of Administration the opportunity to submit comments in response to House Bill No. 7386, which proposes new amendments to State Aid to Libraries law, specifically relating to public access to reading materials.

The Constitution of the State of Rhode Island, [Article XII](#), establishes that the diffusion of knowledge is essential to the preservation of the rights and liberties of the people, and that it is the duty of government to secure the “advantages and opportunities of education and public library services.” This “diffusion of knowledge” cannot be advanced if libraries do not make available a wide diversity of materials, information, and perspectives in their collections, enabling all Rhode Islanders to find resources in their public libraries that speak to and inform their experience.

Rhode Island’s public libraries support the reading and information seeking needs of individuals in their communities from the very young to the very old, from students to professionals and retirees. The materials on the shelves of libraries and in their online collections are carefully curated by trained professionals, as required by regulations promulgated by OLIS ([220-RICR-60-15-02](#)), to provide a breadth and depth of resources that meet the needs of the wide range of individuals in their community. Any efforts to restrict the materials in library collections for political, partisan or doctrinal disagreement contradicts the RI Constitution’s charge to libraries to support the diffusion of knowledge. Enshrining the right to read freely in Rhode Island law strengthens this charge and supports the advancement of knowledge that is key to a flourishing democracy.

OLIS appreciates the opportunity to share our strong support of this legislation with the Committee. If there are any questions, please feel free to contact my office at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Karen Mellor
Chief of Library Services

cc: The Honorable Representative Jennifer A. Stewart
The Honorable Members of the House Committee on State Government & Elections
Steve Sepe, Clerk
Nicole McCarty, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House

