

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in support of H7386 the Freedom to Read Act introduced by Representatives Stewart, Morales, Potter, Boylan, Sanchez, Cruz, Kazarian, Ackerman, Voas, and Casimiro. As the Head of Youth Services at Providence Public Library and a regular library patron in Cranston, I am keenly aware of the positive and lasting impact libraries have on both young people and adults.

Libraries are an integral part of our society. They provide shelter and sometimes basic needs items to our unhoused populations during the day and during inclement weather. They assist patrons with access to wrap around social services, finding jobs, completing and submitting important government documents, utilizing technology, and notarization, just to name a few. They offer robust educational and cultural programming for all patrons ages, birth to adult. They offer ESL and citizenship classes which are a lifeline for new immigrants. They offer technology classes which allow adults to learn basic skills to navigate the digital age and also upskill so they can move into new career paths. They offer a free, safe place for teenagers to hang out after school, to get help with their homework or applying for a job, to be around caring adults who will listen. They provide storytimes for new parents who are trying to socialize their children and connect with other parents. They provide connection for our elderly populations who can be incredibly isolated and need someone to talk to.

Despite all the crucial services libraries provide for and with the community, they are desperately unfunded and under attack by those who would like to censor and restrict what people can read. Libraries are the cornerstones of democracy - one of the last places in our communities where people of all ages, from all socioeconomic, educational, racial, cultural, and gendered backgrounds are able to congregate together, for free, and have privacy, autonomy, and access to information.

We ask so much of our libraries and our library workers - those who went into the profession to provide research support, book recommendations, and programming now find themselves acting as social workers and navigating the front lines of severe housing, mental health, and drug abuse crises. We can't continue to expect so much from these workers and institutions if we're not going to back them up both with financial support and protections from those who would attack libraries for providing access to information. It is the responsibility of government at all levels to provide adequate financial and legislative support for all free public libraries so that we can continue to serve our communities.

I hope that you will support H7386 the Freedom to Read Act.

Thank you,
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