

February 29, 2024

Greetings, Chair Shanley, First Vice Chair Messier, Second Vice Chair Corvese, Representatives Ajello, Baginski, Brien, Hull, Karazian, Kennedy, Knight, McGaw, Newberry, Quattrocchi, Shallcross Smith, and Tanzi.

Please accept my **written testimony in opposition to 2024 – H 7386**, sponsored by Representatives Stewart, Morales, Potter, Boylan, Sanchez, Cruz, Kazarian, Ackerman, Voas, and Casimiro.

To assume the public should have no say in how its money is spent by the government represents a fundamental and profound departure from government's Constitutional duty to represent that public.

While books should not be banned from the public square on a whim, equally wrong is prohibiting any review and debate about the appropriateness of their contents. This bill would violate the fundamental right of Americans to raise grievances against their government's action. And, to clarify, those who spend public money are, indeed, part of the government, whether they call themselves librarians or school administrators, school board members, elected representatives, or the governor.

Our past silence reflects misplaced trust that librarians and school officials were acting in the best interest of our children. The days of blind trust are over. These once-trusted institutions of learning have been infiltrated by untrustworthy radicals who sabotage the mental health, social, cultural – and (although it is not their job) – spiritual well-being of our children – of all of us! The betrayal is profound.

Now, they seek protection from the public by denying our right to question the soundness of their decisions. The bill's proposed prohibition of public review and input is tantamount to censorship. I trust the irony of that situation does not escape you.

There must be a process in place to assess the judgment of those who would spend public money to acquire and distribute printed material to the public, especially to children. To pass this broad language – any language that prohibits public oversight – opens the door to obscene and pornographic material in what should be children's safe public spaces. In fact, many of us say that line has *already been crossed* – but this bill elevates such unthinkable extremism by actually *protecting* pornography and obscene material in public spaces – with no remedy. And that is the key – no remedy. Placing objectionable, *age-inappropriate* materials in the hands of minors *can never go unchallenged*.

Librarians may not have taken an oath of office to protect the Constitution, but you did. I urge you to reject this bill to protect the democratic rights and freedoms of Rhode Islanders to petition their government for redress of grievances. Please do not silence dissent but rather foster open dialogue and accountability in government for the betterment of our society and the future of our children.

Respectfully,

Lucia M. Raposo
North Providence
401-300-4783