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H 7386 - Rhode Island Library Association SUPPORT for the Freedom to Read Bill

This bill 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.

Further, this bill declares that it will be the policy of the state to protect the freedom of libraries from external limitations and attempts to ban, remove, censor or otherwise restrict access to books and other materials.

Of significance, this bill also prohibits the removal of materials due to partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

The Issues:

- Currently, libraries in Rhode Island and across the nation are facing an unprecedented wave of attempts to censor library materials and criminalize the practices of librarianship.
- Some states have succumbed to partisan pressure and passed legislation in support of book bans.
- Large majorities of voters (71%) oppose efforts to have books removed from their local public libraries (ALA, 2022).
- 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).
- Rhode Islanders have a constitutional right to library service, and the General Assembly has the duty to promote and support libraries, as outlined in Article XII of the Rhode Island Constitution:
"The diffusion of knowledge... being essential to the preservation of their rights and liberties, it shall be the duty of the general assembly to promote...public libraries, and to adopt all means which it may deem necessary and proper to secure to the people the advantages and opportunities of education and public library services."
- 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.

The Rhode Island Library Association urges the passage of H 7386.