

28 February 2024

House Committee on State Government and Elections

The State of Rhode Island General Assembly

82 Smith Street

Providence, RI 02903

Re: SUPPORT FOR BILL H 7386, introduced Jan 31, 2024

To the Honorable Members of the House Committee on State Government and Elections:

I write in enthusiastic support of House Bill 7386 or the "Freedom to Read" bill, which would ensure that public libraries in Rhode Island can acquire materials without limitations and protect them from partisan censorship.

As a proud lifelong user of Rhode Island public libraries, it is vitally important to me that those public libraries are able to acquire materials that their patrons need, including materials by and about people of color, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and other under-represented groups. As a librarian myself, I know how much care, thought, and effort goes into the process of selecting those materials that can add breadth and balance to library collections.

However, I am also aware of the increasing trend of book challenges across the country in recent years, and how those challenges can divert librarians' valuable time and libraries' already-spread-thin financial resources towards fighting litigation when they should instead be dedicated to providing the collections and services that patrons need. At the same time, Rhode Island is currently the only state in New England (and one of only six states in the country) without laws in place that assert an affirmative defense for librarians and educators if confronted with obscenity proceedings.

The "Freedom to Read" bill would ensure that those exemptions from prosecution are in place for Rhode Island librarians so that they can continue their important collection development work without fear of legal reprisal or harassment for simply doing their jobs. I urge you to pass this bill and protect Rhode Islanders' freedom to read.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Susan Chakmakian
Cranston, RI