



April 2, 2025

TO: The House Committee on State Government and Elections
FROM: Anne Marie Silvia, Chair, Board of Trustees, Rogers Free Library, Bristol, RI
RE: House Bill H5726 – Freedom to Read Act
Position: FOR

Dear Members of the Committee:

The freedom to read is under threat across the country and in Rhode Island.

Book bans are increasing in the United States. A recent report from the free expression-focused nonprofit PEN America says that more than 4,000 titles have been banned across the country.

In Rhode Island, including Westerly, North Kingstown, Pawtucket and Bristol there have been attempts to restrict or ban books from local shelves. Librarians from Chepachet and Providence have been victims of harassment and pressured to remove books from the shelves.

In Bristol, a patron kicked an “everyone is welcome” sign after his behavior had been consistently escalating -- including yelling “fa**ot books” throughout the library. The Bristol Police Department suggested we ban him for one year due to his increasingly dangerous conduct.

House bill H5726, The Freedom to Read Act promotes free expression and access of information by prohibiting censorship of library materials. It would shield libraries and schools from book challenges and censorship attempts.

The bill, in no way, takes away parents' rights. It creates a clear process for someone objecting to a book. It does not mandate that any child, adolescent, student, or parent be required to read any book. The bills don't mandate libraries purchase any book or type of book.

Librarians, their staffs and their patrons should feel safe in public library space. They should not have to fear individuals or groups who threaten the right to read or their right and responsibility to do their jobs. This bill has more comprehensive and legal protections for librarians and staff.

The Board of Trustees recognizes and supports staff who are members of the Rhode Island Library Association (RILA) and supports RILA's Statement on Intellectual Freedom. The Rogers Free Library Board of Trustees fully supports passage of this legislation.

Sincerely,

Anne Marie Silvia
Chair, Board of Trustees
Rogers Free Library
525 Hope St.
Bristol, RI 02809

Cc: House Government Committee Clerk Steven Sepe
Speaker of the House: Rep Joseph Shekarchi
House Majority Leader: Christopher R. Blazewski
Representative June Speakman
Mary Parella, Bristol Town Council
Steven Contente, Administrator Town of Bristol