

Steven Sepe

From: Beverly N Smith <noreply@adv.actionnetwork.org>
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 11:54 AM
To: House State Government and Elections Committee
Subject: Support for HB #5726: RI Freedom to Read Act

Committee State Government Clerk,

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill #5726: the Rhode Island Freedom to Read Act. This bill is essential to protecting Rhode Islanders' fundamental rights to free speech, free inquiry, and access to diverse ideas — values enshrined in both the First Amendment and the Rhode Island Constitution.

We are witnessing an unprecedented rise in censorship efforts across the country and right here in Rhode Island. According to the American Library Association, in 2023 alone, there were 1,247 documented demands to censor books and other library materials, with 4,240 unique titles challenged—an alarming increase from just 223 in 2020. These challenges are not isolated events. They are part of a coordinated movement by organized groups seeking to limit public access to books, particularly those representing LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC voices.

Rhode Island is not immune to these attacks. In our own state, we have seen an increase in book bans targeting school libraries, with 28 titles challenged by outside groups. These actions undermine the rights of all Rhode Islanders to seek information freely and make their own reading choices.

The Rhode Island Freedom to Read Act is a necessary safeguard against these growing threats. Specifically, it would:

- Protects librarians, teachers, and museum staff from unjust legal and professional consequences simply for fulfilling their responsibilities. Rhode Island must align with over 40 other states that already provide these protections.
- Establishes a legal recourse for those harmed by censorship, allowing students, authors, publishers, and booksellers to challenge improper government censorship, with legal fees covered outside of library funding.
- Upholds parental choice by allowing families to determine appropriate reading materials for

their own children while ensuring that no single group can dictate what others are allowed to access.

This bill is not about limiting choice—it is about protecting it. The vast majority of Americans—71%—oppose book bans, and 91% agree that no one should control what other families can read. Libraries and schools should remain places of learning, exploration, and free expression, not battlegrounds for political and ideological censorship.

I urge you to stand with Rhode Island's educators, librarians, and families by supporting the Rhode Island Freedom to Read Act. Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your leadership and commitment to protecting intellectual freedom in Rhode Island.

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