

Steven Sepe

From: Caroline Richmond <carolinerichmond@diversebooks.org>
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 9:08 PM
To: House State Government and Elections Committee; Rep. Shekarchi, K Joseph; Rep. Blazejewski, Christopher R.
Subject: Written Testimony on the Freedom to Read Act H5726

Dear Rep. Joseph Shekarchi, Rep. Christopher R. Blazejewski, and House Government Committee Clerk Steven Sepe:

My name is Caroline Richmond, and I'm the Executive Director of We Need Diverse Books (WNDB), a 501c3 nonprofit that strives to create a world where every reader can find themselves in a book.

We Need Diverse Books is FOR Rhode Island's Freedom to Read Act (H5726); and we strongly support protections for book creators, including authors, illustrators, editors and publishers incorporated in this bill.

Over four million students in the United States are now affected by book bans and challenges. Thousands of titles have been [targeted for censorship](#), while books discussing race and racism, and LGBTQ+ and transgender identities are [being challenged at consistently high rates](#). Rhode Island's Freedom to Read bill can effectively fight prejudice-based censorship by protecting the rights of book creators who belong to marginalized groups.

Young readers are profoundly affected when authors from historically underrepresented communities are targeted and their stories are suppressed. LGBTQIA+ youth are more than [four times as likely to attempt suicide than their peers](#), while the suicide rate among Black adolescents has [increased faster than other racial and ethnic groups, rising 54 percent since 2018](#). When these children lose access to diverse books, they learn a powerful lesson: their stories, their lives, don't matter.

At WNDB, we've long recognized that diverse literature has the unique ability to create lifelong readers, develop language skills, and create connection amongst communities. Studies show that children read more than four hours per week when they have access to diverse literature; and in a survey of 2,000 schools, 90 percent of educators believe that children would become more enthusiastic readers if they had books reflecting their lives. There is power in a diverse story, and we all benefit from reading them — because diverse books are for everyone.

We support the passage of the Freedom to Read Act H5726, securing protections for all writers and illustrators, so that they may continue to create books that serve all children in the state of Rhode Island, our nation, and the world.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Caroline Richmond
We Need Diverse Books



Caroline Richmond
Executive Director, WNDB
www.diversebooks.org
she/her
[Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#)

