



House Committee on State Government and Elections

- Support **FOR H 5726, The Freedom to Read Act**
- Hearing date: April 3, 2025

Chair Evan Stanley and distinguished Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the League of Women Voters of RI, I am testifying in support of House Bill 5726, An Act Relating to Libraries - The Freedom to Read Act.

The League of Women's Voters is well-known for its 105-year-old mission: "Empowering voters. Defending Democracy." But several weeks ago, in light of the political maneuverings in Washington, an urgent request was volleyed from the League's national headquarters: "Ensure our democracy survives, and every person has representation." This charge is no small undertaking. But we can begin today, here in Rhode Island, by defending free speech and our freedom to read, by passing "The Freedom to Read Act".

These are challenging times. Our republic is under attack. Our nation's system of checks and balances has gone awry. Books are being banned at public libraries and removed from classroom shelves. Textbooks and government records are being destroyed. History is being rewritten. Journalists are being denied access. And truth is up for grabs.

But the law is on our side. The right to free speech is enshrined in our nation's bill of rights. It is the first amendment because it is so fundamental to the effectiveness and endurance of our Republic. This right supports our need for an educated and informed citizenry. This amendment sanctions a free press to ensure transparency in government. It allows WE, THE PEOPLE, to hold elected officials accountable. We must recommit ourselves to this fundamental freedom and to the rule of law if we are to save this nation.

I was heartened by last month's press conference in support of H 5726 and its companion bill in the Senate. A standing room only crowd was held captive by the passionate pleas of legislators, librarians, banned book authors, publishers, and youth organizers. All there in defense of the FREEDOM TO READ. We must unite with them and passionately defend our rights and this freedom.

But time is of the essence. Our nation is in crisis. At the conclusion of the Constitutional Convention in 1787, Ben Franklin was asked what transpired. Understanding the fragile nature of this new nation's democracy and concerned about the power vested in its federal government, he replied, "[It's]... a Republic, if you can keep it." ...We must keep it. If our democracy is to survive and thrive, with every person having equal representation, the first amendment must be upheld and enforced. We must pass House Bill 5726.

Please support "The Freedom to Read Act" and send it to the House with a recommendation for passage.

Thank you,

Diana (Donnie) McGee

Diana (Donnie) McGee, Advocacy Committee Cochair

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