



April 3, 2025

**The Honorable Evan P. Shanley, Chair**  
**House State Government & Elections Committee**  
**Rhode Island Statehouse**  
**Providence, 02903**

**RE: Testimony In Support of House Bill No. 5726 - Relating to Libraries - Freedom To Read Act**

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we express our strong support for House Bill No. 5726 - The Freedom to Read Act - which advances equitable access to high-quality education and the free exchange of ideas. Through the **ACHIEVE UNITED** initiative of our **LIVE UNITED 2025 Strategic Plan**, we are committed to ensuring that every Rhode Islander—regardless of background—has the resources, opportunities, and support they need to succeed from early childhood through post-secondary education.

House Bill No. 5726 is a critical step in protecting inclusive reading materials in school and public libraries—spaces that serve as gateways to learning, literacy, and civic engagement. The legislation upholds the rights of educators, librarians, and communities to provide diverse literature that reflects the lived experiences of all Rhode Islanders, including multilingual learners, BIPOC youth, LGBTQ+ students, and others who have historically been underrepresented in educational content.

Public libraries, in particular, serve as a cornerstone for learning and equity—offering free access to books, technology, and programs that help close opportunity gaps. Research shows that exposure to inclusive and affirming educational content leads to higher academic engagement and improved mental health outcomes, especially among marginalized youth (Kosciw et al., 2023). Moreover, 71% of voters oppose book bans and believe that public libraries should provide materials representing a variety of viewpoints and experiences (EveryLibrary & Echelon Insights, 2022).

Access to education and information is the foundation of a strong, inclusive democracy. House Bill No. 5726 will help ensure that all Rhode Islanders—youth and adults alike—have access to diverse and representative materials in our schools and public libraries. Whether it's a student strengthening their

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literacy skills or an adult pursuing lifelong learning, everyone deserves the freedom to read and learn without censorship or fear. By protecting this access, we can break cycles of exclusion, promote literacy at every age, and build a more informed Rhode Island. We respectfully urge your support for this legislation to uphold diversity, dignity, and the right to read for all.

Sincerely,

**Elijah McLean**

Manager, Government Relations & Policy

United Way Rhode Island

Uniting our community and resources to build racial equity and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders.

50 Vallet Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02909 | (401) 444-0600 | [unitedwayri.org](http://unitedwayri.org)