



WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Bill No.: HB-5726
Primary Sponsors: An Act Relating to Libraries – The Freedom to Read Act
Representatives Morales, Stewart, Paplauskas, Boylan, Carson, Cotter,
Ajello, Speakman, Handy, and Kislak
Committee: House State Government & Elections
Date: April 3, 2025

The Rhode Island Women's Bar Association ("RIWBA") supports this bill. RIWBA is a non-profit organization that promotes the advancement of the status of women in the State of Rhode Island and in the legal profession.

The Freedom to Read Act is designed to protect the rights enshrined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and the Rhode Island Constitution. It ensures that all Rhode Islanders have free access to a wide array of books and materials, shielding libraries, librarians, schools, and teachers from frivolous and expensive lawsuits and challenges from special interest groups outside their communities.

It aligns Rhode Island with 44 other states, including all other New England states, that have protections for library workers performing their professional duties. By standardizing guidelines for library acquisition and review policies, the bill ensures that all Rhode Island libraries have written policies that meet state guidelines and establish uniform procedures for handling challenges. This legislation is vital for maintaining a robust marketplace of ideas and fostering a well-informed, democratic society.

Reading a wide variety of texts and authors is fundamental to developing critical reading skills and comprehension. Exposure to different perspectives and writing styles enhances students' ability to think critically, analyze complex issues, and understand nuanced arguments. These skills are crucial for developing future leaders and lawyers who must navigate and interpret differing viewpoints and legal precedents. By ensuring access to a broad spectrum of literature, the Freedom to Read Act plays a vital role in preparing our youth for leadership roles and careers in law, where critical thinking and comprehensive understanding are paramount.

By supporting the Freedom to Read Act, we safeguard the rights of every Rhode Islander to access varying ideas and information and ensure that our libraries and schools remain places of learning, growth, and exploration. The Rhode Island Women's Bar Association urges you to vote in favor of the Freedom to Read Act and protect the fundamental freedoms that are the cornerstone of our democratic society.

RIWBA contact: Legislative and Policy Committee Chair, Jennifer L. Sylvia,
riwomensbar@gmail.com