

Senate Committee on Education  
Jillian Waugh  
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**H5726 - Freedom to Read – SUPPORT**

I testify before you today as a passionate advocate for the “Freedom to Read” bill, certain that the freedom to read is vital to our continued democracy. I believe reading is one of our greatest freedoms. It is essential for fostering an informed and empathetic community. As a former elementary and current middle school librarian, I also firmly believe that in thinking about the student behavior and mental health crisis in our state, the freedom to read is essential to the well-being of our students.

I have witnessed pure joy, personal discovery, self-reflection, and the enlightenment of our Rhode Island students through what they choose to read. Pure joy. We need more of that in our state/country/world.

I have enjoyed when students from underrepresented backgrounds have found comfort and a sense of connection from having access to diverse books. One student was so excited to see that a 2025 Asian/Pacific American Award Honor book told a story with characters who look like her and that it had been nominated for multiple awards. She couldn’t wait to check it out and read it. This is a student who is on a path to go on to do great things for our state and probably our country. She is a student who will give back to her community, and much of her attitude and inspiration to do well has been obtained from what she has read.

I have watched anxious students settle into peace and learning as they engaged with a book they picked freely in my library—a 100% healthy remedy to a growing issue with students.

Restricting access to books and libraries for Rhode Island residents will stifle all of these positives and will negatively impact intellectual curiosity, limit our understanding of each other, and will ultimately undermine the foundation of our democratic values. Denying the freedom to read goes against our nation’s tradition of free expression. It is completely unacceptable “to confine what one can read to what another thinks is ‘proper’.”

I urge you to preserve the freedom to read. I urge you to pass the “Freedom to Read” bill.