



National Association of Government Employees

AFFILIATED WITH THE SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Bill No.: House Bill H-5726
An Act Relating to Libraries – The Freedom to Read Act
Primary Sponsors: Morales, Stewart, Paplauskas, Boylan, Carson, Cotter, Ajello, Speakman, Handy, Kislak
Committee: House Committee on State Government and Elections
Date: April 03, 2025

The National Association of Government Employees (NAGE) supports this bill. NAGE Local R1 is a labor union that is the sole and exclusive bargaining agent for all full time library employees who are employed by the Cranston Public Library.

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.

This legislation would bring Rhode Island into alignment with forty-four (44) other states, including all other New England states, that have protections for library workers performing their professional duties. Thirty-one of those states specifically protect librarians from prosecution when working under the scope of their professional responsibilities. Rhode Island is not among the forty-four (44) states that provides some protection from prosecution. It is concerning that three states weakened their protections two years ago. It is more concerning that Rhode Island offers no protection in the first place. We support efforts to protect employees from unjust prosecution and support enacting this legislation.

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.

The National Association of Government Employees urges you to vote in favor of the Freedom to Read Act and protect the freedoms of all Rhode Islanders.

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Respectfully


John J. Rossi