

Steven Sepe

From: Joy Lin <noreply@adv.actionnetwork.org>
Sent: Sunday, March 30, 2025 10:23 AM
To: House State Government and Elections Committee
Subject: Support for HB #5726: RI Freedom to Read Act

Committee State Government Clerk,

As a mother and author and illustrator, I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill #5726: the Rhode Island Freedom to Read Act. This bill is essential to protecting Rhode Islanders' fundamental rights to free speech, free inquiry, and access to diverse ideas — values enshrined in both the First Amendment and the Rhode Island Constitution.

Opponents of this bill believe that they're doing their duty to protect children from inappropriate material that will traumatize them. Librarians and educators are trained for years in the curation of reading material and other media that serve their patrons across all age groups. They are professionally bound to not intentionally place anything on their shelves that would harm children or other library users. If someone does find material that they think is not appropriate, this bill formalizes or reinforces existing channels that a member of a community can take to ask for a review of the material in question to see if it ought to be removed or placed elsewhere.

Still, this might not be enough of a safeguard for some small minority. However, just as traffic accidents cannot be prevented 100% of the time despite implementing safety measures for car seats and seat belt usage and 25 mph speed limits around schools and hiring crossing guards, we haven't banned cars from driving past schools or onto school property. Banning books would be just as extreme a measure. The question is how can parents feel empowered to address their child reading something they're not comfortable with? A study of children who lived through the blitzkrieg of London during World War 2 that showed that there were many who recovered from their trauma to go on and live healthy and fulfilling lives. The key was that they had at least one compassionate adult support them through the experience. Reading a book is nowhere near as traumatic as living through a war. So, I believe that we as adults can be the compassionate grownups that children need if they read or come across a book that might make them uncomfortable, sad, or confused. If we ban books, what we are showing children is that whenever we come across anything we don't understand or fear, the only way of addressing it is to silence and suppress it. That is not the lesson we ought to be teaching

children. We ought to be teaching them how to meet what we don't understand with curiosity and understanding, especially when it comes to other people.

The Rhode Island Freedom to Read Act is a necessary safeguard against a small but vocal political minority that wants to run away from their fears and bring everyone along with them. Specifically, it would:

- Protects librarians, teachers, and museum staff from unjust legal and professional consequences simply for fulfilling their responsibilities. Rhode Island must align with over 40 other states that already provide these protections.
- Establishes a legal recourse for those harmed by censorship, allowing students, authors, publishers, and booksellers to challenge improper government censorship, with legal fees covered outside of library funding.
- Upholds parental choice by allowing families to determine appropriate reading materials for their own children while ensuring that no single group can dictate what others are allowed to access.

This bill is not about limiting choice—it is about protecting it. The vast majority of Americans—71%—oppose book bans, and 91% agree that no one should control what other families can read. Libraries and schools should remain places of learning, exploration, and free expression, not battlegrounds for political and ideological censorship.

I urge you to stand with Rhode Island's educators, librarians, writers, and families by supporting the Rhode Island Freedom to Read Act. Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your leadership and commitment to education and intellectual freedom in Rhode Island.

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