

Kirstin Reveron
Jamestown, RI

Speaker of the House Rep Joseph Shekarchi
House Majority Leader Christopher R. Blazewski
Representative Alex Finkelman

I'm asking you with all earnestness to pass H5276, "The Freedom to Read Act."

There's a growing tide of censorship in the US, and Rhode Island hasn't been immune to it. Even in our state, there are fringe groups who wish to ban books from school and public libraries. Similar groups in other states have pushed (and been successful) not just for banning books, but also punishing librarians with fines and prison sentences for "distributing" books.

While it might be easy to think that these extreme measures wouldn't happen here, it's time to be proactive. In these fractious times, it's important for our state to assert our freedoms by creating legislation to amplify our civil rights. H5726 is an example of this kind of assertion. It seems a given that the first amendment protects our rights to read what books we want to and to have access in our libraries to these books. Unfortunately, this notion is a given no longer.

During this hearing, you may hear from some people who wish to limit access to certain books in the library. Their claim is that they are "protecting" children. I ask you to consider how this restriction on access to written material corresponds with our Constitutional right to free speech. There are no provisions in the Constitution for limiting speech; indeed, in the past several decades, the US Supreme Court has upheld challenges against the right to free speech. Making "The Freedom to Read Act" a law would further strengthen what is already law, and while it may seem redundant, the political climate necessitates that states must protect against those who wish to encroach on our civil liberties.

There will also be people here today who testify about their connection to reading, to books, to literacy and teaching. They will be asking you to protect our rights to read and justifying it with these connections. This is, of course, valid and important, and as a mother, a teacher, and a reader, I also share these connections. However, we should not have to be in a position to justify why we deserve to exercise our civil rights. Americans should have the right to read, to write, to share books, and to express themselves without fear of censorship or punishment from the government. These rights are enshrined in the First Amendment of the Constitution just as surely as the right to bear arms is enshrined in the Second Amendment. And the implication, upheld many times by Supreme Court decisions, is that our right to free speech is also one that "shall not be infringed."

Thank you for your attention. Please make "Freedom to Read" a Rhode Island law.

Sincerely,
Kirstin Reveron,
Jamestown, Rhode Island. April 2, 2025