



March 12th, 2025

~~Senate Bill S 0213~~ "The Freedom to Read Bill"

House Bill H 5726

To the ~~Senate~~ Committee,
House

My name is Leah Bae, and I am a Youth Organizer at the Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE). I am in support of ~~Senate Bill S 0213~~, known as the "The 'Freedom to Read' Bill." House Bill H 5726

As a dedicated social activist with a constantly inquisitive mind, the books I read in my childhood helped me grow into who I am today. I was inspired by rebellious youth who challenged oppressive social systems, from Annemarie Johnson, the young Danish girl who protected her best friend from Nazis in *Number the Stars*, to *The Hunger Games*' Katniss Everdeen, who became the face of the resistance to the totalitarian regime controlling her life.

Books taught me that being curious (*Harry Potter*'s Hermione Granger), being a person of color (*Finding Junie Kim*), and being someone who didn't conform to societal expectations was something to appreciate, to take pride in. The characters they portrayed were proud of it, so why shouldn't I be?

They taught me about social issues I never would have explored further than my middle school classrooms: the Jim Crow era, told through the eyes of Stella and Cassie (*Stella by Starlight* and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*); how this led to systemic racism, introduced to me as a concept in *The Hate U Give*, further explored in Ibram X. Kendi's *Stamped from the Beginning*; World War II and the Holocaust (hardly ever discussed in school on account of us never quite making it past the early 20th century in social studies), discussed in depth in *The War that Saved My Life*, *Letters from Rifka*, or *Resistance*. They taught me that young people were capable of standing up for what they believed in, for their rights and for the rights of others. Most importantly, they showed me real-world examples of this.

Malala Yousafzai, the girl shot by the Taliban for fighting for her right to get an education, a household name for many (at least in the 2010s, shortly after her assassination attempt, founding of the Malala fund, and awarding of the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize). I read her autobiography, *I Am Malala*, when I was nine years old. The oppressive life she lived, the traumatic event she experienced, and her tenacity and determination to stand up for her rights in spite of it were the spark that ignited a passion for justice in myself.

To this day, being a social activist is a strong aspect of my identity. It has positively shaped the way I live my life and interact with others in my constant endeavors for educational equity and

diversity. I have established extremely strong social bonds because of it, especially with people here at ARISE, and it has enriched my life in so many different ways. I never would have developed such an identity without books in my life.

All of the books I have mentioned above have had their place in libraries be contested. I cannot imagine the negative impact that allowing these books to be banned would have on children today. People deserve access to information, and allowing uninformed, non-experts to decide who gets access to what information is a dangerous road to take. This leads to censorship, to education being taken away.

I urge you to support Senate Bill S 0238, and ensure that the future of libraries and librarians are protected. I only seek the enrichment and development of people today, as well as of future generations, and I hope you do as well.

Thank you for your time,

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