

## Steven Sepe

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**From:** Libby Merrill <libby.merrill@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 3, 2025 3:14 PM  
**To:** House State Government and Elections Committee  
**Cc:** Rep. Shanley, Evan P.; Rep. Stewart, Jennifer A.; Rep. Ajello, Edith H.  
**Subject:** Support for the H5726 Freedom to Read Act

Dear Chair Shanley and Members of the House State Government and Elections Committee,

I am writing in favor of House Bill 5726, the Freedom to Read act. I want to thank Representatives Ajello and Stewart for sponsoring this bill. I am a resident of East Providence and the parent of a public school student here.

The freedom to read is a fundamental American right, protected by both the First Amendment and our Rhode Island Constitution. This freedom is currently under unprecedented attack around the country, and this legislation provides critical protection for our libraries, schools, and most importantly, for all Rhode Islanders.

In recent years, we've witnessed an alarming increase in book banning attempts across our nation, including here in Rhode Island. These efforts are often coordinated by well-funded national organizations from outside our state who wish to impose their Christian Nationalist views on what Rhode Islanders can access. In Westerly, we've already seen librarians face threats of criminal charges simply for having certain books in their collection.

This is not who we are as Rhode Islanders. We value intellectual freedom and personal choice.

Parents absolutely have the right to guide their own children's reading choices. What they don't have is the right to dictate what other people's children can read. That's a critical distinction that this legislation respects.

Our schools and libraries are currently handling book challenges on a case-by-case basis, which drains public resources and creates inconsistency across our state. This bill would establish clear, consistent guidelines that protect the freedom to read while still respecting the role of parents in their own children's education.

In America, we don't ban books. Our Constitution protects our access to information and diverse ideas because they're essential for informed debate and a strong democracy. The freedom to read is not just a personal liberty; it's fundamental to maintaining a free society.

I urge you to vote in favor of H5726. Let's ensure that Rhode Island stands firmly on the side of freedom, knowledge, and the constitutional rights of all citizens.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Libby Merrill

East Providence