

Steven Sepe

From: Lisa Sullivan <noreply@adv.actionnetwork.org>
Sent: Wednesday, April 2, 2025 5:20 PM
To: House State Government and Elections Committee
Subject: Support for HB #5726: RI Freedom to Read Act

Committee State Government Clerk,

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill #5726: the Rhode Island Freedom to Read Act.

This bill is even more important in a State that was founded on the principles of religious freedom and a separation between church and state. Boty nationally and locally we are witnessing an unprecedented rise in censorship efforts based exclusively on ONE religious and political ideology. This is not acceptable. Choice is a bedrock to freedom, in any and all things.

According to the American Library Association, in 2023 alone, there were 1,247 documented demands to censor books and other library materials, with 4,240 unique titles challenged—an alarming increase from just 223 in 2020. These challenges are a strategic part of a coordinated movement by organized ideological groups seeking to limit public access to books, particularly those representing any and all voices they disagree with! This is not democratic, it's tyrannical. This is not meant to protect, but to harm and silence opposition. This doesn't represent freedom but oppression. This is not Rhode Island!

These actions undermine the rights of all Rhode Islanders and cannot help being associated with the Nazi book burnings in Germany, during the 1930's.

The Rhode Island Freedom to Read Act is a simple and necessary safeguard against these growing threats. 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.

With so many threats to the basic tenants of the Constitution we MUST fight back on a State level to preserve our state autonomy, our state rights and the freedoms of all who live in Rhode Island.

Specifically, this bill protects librarians, teachers, and museum staff from the danger of legal and professional consequences simply for doing their jobs! There are already 40 states that provide the following protections:

- 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.
- protection of choice by allowing individuals and families to determine appropriate reading materials for their themselves and their 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, citizens and families by supporting the Rhode Island Freedom to Read Act at this pivotal time in our Country's history.

Thank you for your time.

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