



PEN America - Testimony in support of Freedom to Read Act H5726

April 2, 2025

Dear Speaker Joseph Shekarchi and the Members of the House of Representatives:

As a literary and free expression organization, PEN America supports efforts to protect the freedom to read. Since 2021, we've documented thousands of books banned in US public schools—over 10,000 in the 2023-2024 school year alone. Most states in the country—including Rhode Island—have appeared in our index of banned books since 2021, and the rate of challenges and bans in the country have not yet lowered. As such, the need for policy that protects the freedom to read cannot be understated.

We are writing to express our firm support for H5726, the Freedom to Read Act. This important legislation will protect librarians, educators, students, and writers from the harmful impacts of censorship which has run rampant in our schools and libraries. The bill would affirm the freedom to read as a human right, strengthen processes for the curation of library materials, and protect educators and librarians so they can do their jobs free from political threats and intimidation; these provisions would be a win for readers and writers in Rhode Island. We have witnessed and documented the devastating impact book bans have had on communities and young people across the country and believe the provisions put forth in this bill will help safeguard the rights of citizens, and the operation of public institutions, in a manner that upholds democracy and intellectual freedom.

We urge this committee to do the right thing for Rhode Island's readers and writers by supporting this vital bill.

Sincerely,

Madison Markham

Program Coordinator, Freedom to Read

PEN America

mmarkham@pen.org