

Steven Sepe

From: Nancy Kellner <nrkellner@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 1, 2025 2:40 PM
To: House State Government and Elections Committee; blazejewski@rilegislature.gov; shekarchi@rilegislature.gov; Rep. Donovan, Susan R
Subject: H5276 Freedom to Read Testimony

Dear Speaker and Representatives,

Please accept this testimony in support of House Bill 5276-The Freedom to Read Act.

Our democracy relies on a well- informed public. Our health (mental and physical) depends on access to accurate information and seeing ourselves as part of the fabric of our country. Our lives are enriched by the diversity of thought and opinion expressed via literature, nonfiction and the arts.

I have seen firsthand what censorship looks like. As a retired elementary school librarian I was required to respond to a parent complaint about a nonfiction botany book because one of the illustrations referred to plant **ovaries**. On another occasion when checking a return in, I discovered that a picture book about indigenous Americans had been meticulously altered (clearly by an adult) to draw breeches over all the **males wearing loincloths**. Parents regularly objected to the popular early reading series “Junie B Jones” because the title character did not have perfect grammar (as a kindergartener) and used the word “**stupid**”.

While these appear to be innocuous examples, they are evidence of individual parents trying to make decisions for the entire student body. The more serious challenges we are seeing today are far more worrisome. Book challengers are often uninformed, politically motivated, and more significantly not locally driven.

According to the American Library Association, in 2023, titles representing the voices and lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC individuals made up 47% of those targeted in censorship attempts. The voices that most need to be heard are being silenced. As the federal government continues to dismantle the Bill of Rights, it is up to us, as Rhode Islanders, to protect it.

Please vote in favor of this bill. Thank you for your consideration.

Nancy Kellner
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