

**Nicole Dyszlewski, Freedom to Read Coalition
Testimony in Favor of HB 5726**

My name is Nicole P. Dyszlewski and I am a librarian, lawyer, law professor, and resident of Riverside.

I write today as one of the leaders of the Rhode Island Freedom to Read Coalition, an all grassroots effort to support HB 5726, oppose censorship of library materials, and support protections for librarians and content creators.

Our coalition consists of a diversity of librarians, authors, publishers, booksellers, moms, readers, voters, rabbis, ministers, and several organizations such as:

Rhode Island Library Association
Rhode Island Council of Churches
NEARI
RIFTHP
Authors Against Book Bans
ARISE
Common Cause Rhode Island
The Womxn Project
Rhode Island League of Women Voters
RI ACLU
Pride in Aging
RI Atheists
East Bay Citizens for Peace
TeachTruthRI Coalition
Rhode Island Center for the Book
New England Independent Booksellers Association
American Booksellers Association
American Booksellers for Free Expression
Rhode Island Jewish Alliance
Latino Policy Institute
School Librarians of Rhode Island
Everylibrary
Rhode Island Women's Bar Association
Jewish Alliance of Greater Rhode Island
Rhode Island Readers for Banned and Challenged Books

We have been holding events, large and small, throughout our state in support of this bill. Hopefully you have seen our postcard, heard our voices, and witnessed our advocacy.

On behalf of the coalition I write to share our support for HB5726:

- The suppression of books, educational materials, and literature has escalated in libraries.
- Book bans are on the rise in public school libraries. The 2023-2024 school year recorded the highest instances of book bans and highest number of unique titles banned – over 4,000 unique titles were removed in over 10,000 instances of book bans. Disproportionate to publishing rates, this subset of titles in school libraries overwhelmingly include books with people and characters of color (44%) and books with LGBTQ+ people and characters (39%).
- The efforts to challenge, restrict, or ban access to library materials disproportionately impacts marginalized communities as book bans perpetuate the representation of underrepresented communities.
- According to American Library Association data, in 2023, the year with the most recent data collected, analyzed and made public, 47% of books targeted for censorship in the United States were about LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC individuals.
- The freedom to read is foundational to an informed and educated democracy.
- We believe in the 1st amendment.
- We believe that librarians are valuable and their professional collection development decisions should be protected.
- We believe the individual voices of authors and illustrators of all races, genders, gender identities, ethnicities, religions, and beliefs are important.
- We see value in access to a diversity of library materials.