

Steven Sepe

From: Paul O.Zelinsky <poz@paulozelinsky.com>
Sent: Sunday, March 30, 2025 5:21 PM
To: House State Government and Elections Committee
Cc: Krystyna Poray Goddu; Jonathan Friedman
Subject: Testimony in favor of Freedom to Read Act H5726

To the RI House Government Committee Clerk:

Dear Steven Sepe,

The Children's and Young Adult Books Committee of PEN America (PEN = Poets, Playwrights, Editors, Essayists and Novelists) is FOR Rhode Island's Freedom to Read Act (H5726) and strongly supports all protections for writers in this bill.

Authors and illustrators who create books for children and young adults are under attack in the United States. In the 2023-2024 school year, PEN America counted more than 10,000 book bans in public schools. PEN America has documented nearly 16,000 book bans in public schools nationwide since 2021, a number not seen since the 1950s. The current wave of censorship targets work by authors from communities that have long struggled for publication and recognition: writers of color, writers who identify as LGBTQ+ and writers who are women.

PEN America was founded over a hundred years ago to serve the interests of writers around the world and continues to defend their freedom to write. The censorship, hate mail and threats that writers are now facing is detrimental to their creativity and negatively impacts writers' remuneration. PEN America pushes back against censorship and the intolerance and exclusion that undergird it.

We urge you to pass this legislation keeping intact its protections for all writers.

Thank you. Sincerely,

Krystyna Poray Goddu and Paul O. Zelinsky, Co-chairs

Childrens and Young Adult Book Committee of PEN America