

Steven Sepe

From: Peter Quesnel <ptqprov@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 3, 2025 11:34 AM
To: House State Government and Elections Committee
Subject: H 5726 Testimony

Dear House Government Committee,

I am writing in support of House Bill 5726, The Freedom to Read Act. As a retired teacher and school librarian who spent my career encouraging students to read and helping them discover their passions through reading and learning, I would like to share my thoughts on the Freedom to Read Act.

First and foremost, all people have a right to read, learn and pursue their intellectual interests in whatever format they prefer. As a free society, our Constitution guarantees our basic rights, and we have the freedom to have our own thoughts and beliefs. Our libraries provide us with multitudes of books and other sources for us to choose from as we exercise our right to think and read freely.

The Freedom to Read Act upholds our right to read freely and protects the libraries and librarians who provide us with the books and resources to choose from.

It seems that people from all sectors of society like libraries. The Pew Research Center reports that 95% of Americans agree that the materials and resources available at public libraries play an important role in giving everyone a chance to succeed.

But not everyone likes or approves of all the books that are on library shelves. Sometimes people challenge the books that are in library collections claiming that the titles are objectionable and unsuited for various populations to read. Often, these book challenges are aimed at books for children and young adults.

Throughout my career I have followed book challenges based on objections to topics that deal with race, racism, sexuality and sexual orientation among other topics. As a person who went through the process of coming out as gay as a younger adult, I paid close attention to these challenges and the arguments put forth to keep these books from children and young adults.

Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret by Judy Blume was challenged and removed from library shelves multiple times over the decades since it was published in 1970, especially in the 1980s. Book challengers objected to its frank discussion of sexuality among other topics. But, this Judy Blume novel presents a sensitive and humorous story that allows girls to learn about their changing bodies and to explore their questions about life and faith to this day. It has received awards, is still well read today and has been adapted into film.

The ground-breaking *Annie On My Mind* by Nancy Garden was one of the first young adult novels to sensitively portray gay or lesbian relationships. Written in 1982, it was subject to book burnings and a lawsuit. All because some individuals did not approve of same-sex relationships being portrayed in a positive light.

As a young adult myself, there were no books that featured LGBT+ characters or themes available on any library shelf that I would have perused. As an adult I celebrated the progress I have witnessed in book publication. Authors have given us so many new books that explore identities and ideas that readers long for.

As a school librarian I was happy to be able to provide my students with reading options that included characters of all sexual orientations, identities, races and cultures. Kids now have books to choose from where

they can see themselves and their stories reflected as well the lives and stories of people who are from different backgrounds and identities.

The aim of my testimony is to emphasize the value of providing library patrons with a diversity of books that readers of all stripes can choose from. LGBT+ readers and all readers hunger for books that give them role models and hope as they grow into themselves.

Please continue to allow libraries and librarians to provide all kinds of books for all kinds of readers without worrying about civil or criminal penalties because of the books they select. Please pass the Freedom to Read Act.

Sincerely,
Peter Quesnel
Providence