

## Steven Sepe

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**From:** Robin Alario <alario\_r@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, March 31, 2025 6:04 PM  
**To:** House State Government and Elections Committee  
**Subject:** Freedom to Read Act - H5726

Dear Rhode Islanders

As residents of this great state founded on the principles of freedom which has always marched to the beat of our own drummer since 1636, we must protect those freedoms with a freedom to read act.

As a reader, former literature major, lifelong learner, historian, librarian, and archivist (URI trained) and now an aunt of teens, I wholeheartedly support the freedom to read. I've been following BookRiot's Literary Activism newsletter (<https://bookriot.com/newsletter/literary-activism/>) for several years now and have seen alarming and terrifying things happening in other states. There is a coordinated attack on libraries, librarians and the freedom to read coming from dark money funneling into mega churches. They claim to want to protect innocent children yet do not actually care about innocent children as evidenced by banning books primarily by and about LGBTQIA+ people, people of color and women.

The censors, some of which you have heard from here in our own state, are taking passages from books out of context and posting them on social media. Authors have reported having fake reviews with AI generated images posted on Amazon (<https://www.abc15.com/news/let-joe-know/childrens-book-called-sexually-explicit-arizona-childrens-author-fights-fake-review#:~:text=After%20a%20year%20of%20trying%20to%20get,team%20after%20she%20struck%20out%20with%20Amazon.>). Innocuous books about crayons, kitties who feel like unicorns have been removed from libraries based on interpretations and personal bias. Picture books featuring nudity, yes art books, and goblin butts and classics like "In the Night Kitchen" have been censored with cries of "pornography". None of the images in any way shape or form meet the legal definition of pornography. Also when kids have phones in their hands, they're exposed to much worse, not to mention misinformation, disinformation and outright lies. There is a legal test, the Miller Test, for determining the line between acceptable and the p-word. If you take a look at Dr. Taslynn Magnusson's book censorship database [https://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/book\\_censorship\\_database\\_magnusson](https://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/book_censorship_database_magnusson) you will see book banning is a)not a hoax and b)none of the books meet the legal definition of you know what! I know because I've been reading as many of the books as possible, starting with the picture books. An illustration of two moms or two dads loving their child does not make a book obscene any more than an illustration of a male child in a tutu, dress, polka-dotted tights or nothing at all.

Books that just happen show children of color have been banned because they MIGHT be divisive. Some people can't imagine a world in which Black and Brown children live with two loving parents, go to school and play with friends. Books about sexism, racism and other historical topics have been banned simply because they seek to share the truth about history. You can't change the past but you can learn from it and move forward. Books about sexual violence have been banned. How else are we supposed to recognize it if we don't see it?

Florida has essentially banned African-American history and queer representation.

Sex-ed books are being banned as well. Again, we need to learn these things and if parents can't/won't share that information with their children, their children will look elsewhere and come across actual obscene content, misinformation and misleading information. No they're not looking in the dictionary at dirty words wither.

Additionally, children will self-censor their own reading. As a youth I only wanted to read Anne of Green Gables, Little Women and the classics. I would never have willingly picked up and looked at any of the modern issue novels of today. However, it's a different world and my nieces and nephews' generations want to make the world a better place than they found it. One way they learn about the world around them is through books. Books are windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors. They provide a look into the lives of others, help readers develop empathy and reflect their own experiences.

Those who seek to censor reading are not actually reading the books. They're cherry picking passages they don't like and taking them out of context. These passages and images are posted on social media and shared and reshared. The computer algorithms help fan the flames by bringing up "more like this" until people are convinced there's some kind of "agenda" to a)sexualize their kids and b)make them hate America. If people really wanted to protect children, they would ensure equal access to information and ensure ALL children are seen.

I know from my education at URI librarians don't just choose whatever books are trending on Amazon or even all the books their patrons ask for. They have access to professional peer reviewed journal reviews and take a look at the reviews, books which have won awards, books that may have special interest to their patrons in their community and publisher age recommendations. They take all those factors into consideration before purchasing even one book. Stop by any of our wonderful libraries and chat with the librarian to learn more about the process. They will also tell you any patron has the right to file a request for reconsideration form. Many libraries require the entire book be read and the form filled out completely. This is not what is happening in Alabama, Florida, Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, New Hampshire, districts in Minnesota, Wisconsin and even California where a small, vocal group of people think they can tell librarians how to do their jobs.

Let's channel the spirit of Roger Williams and pass this Freedom to Read Act as we approach the 390th anniversary (2026) of the founding of Rhode Island! Thank you Rep. Morales and Sen. Mc Kenney for introducing this bill.

Sincerely,

Robin Alario, Pawtucket

(Please withhold my name from public record thank you!)



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