

## Steven Sepe

---

**From:** Timothy Kenney <timkenneyeghs@msn.com>  
**Sent:** Sunday, March 30, 2025 6:54 AM  
**To:** House State Government and Elections Committee; Rep. Shekarchi, K Joseph; Rep. Blazejewski, Christopher R.; Rep. Read, III, Earl A.  
**Cc:** msteever@egsd.net  
**Subject:** Freedom to Read Act

I am writing to urge you to support the Rhode Island Freedom to Read bill, a critical piece of legislation that upholds the fundamental American right to access books and ideas freely. The freedom to read is enshrined in the First Amendment and the Rhode Island Constitution, and this bill ensures that our libraries remain places of open inquiry, learning, and diverse perspectives.

Across the country, we have seen a surge in book bans and censorship efforts, often driven by well-funded national organizations that do not represent the values or needs of our local communities. Rhode Island has not been immune to these challenges—our school committees have faced more than twenty book challenges in the past three years, some against titles nominated for the Rhode Island Children's Book Award. In Westerly, we even saw the alarming precedent of legal action against librarians simply for doing their jobs.

This bill provides necessary protections for our libraries and the professionals who staff them by:

- Strengthening and standardizing the selection process for books in Rhode Island's libraries, ensuring access to diverse perspectives appropriate for different age groups.
- Shielding librarians from frivolous lawsuits and criminal charges for carrying out their professional duties, aligning Rhode Island with the 44 states—including all of New England—that already have such protections.
- Protecting local decision-making by requiring that only residents of a school district may challenge a book's presence in a school library.

The overwhelming majority of Americans oppose book bans. A 2022 EveryLibrary Institute poll found that 91% of voters agree with the statement: "If you don't like a book at a library, don't check it out. Other people shouldn't be able to control what me or my family can read." Furthermore, 71% of voters oppose book bans altogether (ALA). As Rhode Islanders, we take pride in our rich literary and artistic culture, which employs over 18,000 people and contributes to both our economy and our democratic values.

Censorship is not a patriotic act. Informed debate and a strong democracy depend on access to information and ideas. I urge you to support the Rhode Island Freedom to Read bill and stand with those who believe in intellectual freedom, free expression, and the right of every individual to explore the marketplace of ideas.

Please let me know how you plan to support this essential legislation. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Timothy Kenney, PhD