

Thank you to the Chair and members of the committee for the opportunity to speak with you on the Freedom to Read Act

My name is Vanessa Dyer. I live in Bristol, and I am a library media teacher in the Portsmouth School District. I have been a public-school teacher for six years.

I am speaking in support of House bill 5726, the Freedom to Read act, which I believe will have a positive impact on Rhode Island school communities. The Freedom to Read Act outlines appropriate, thoughtful and professional policies for a school library to handle collection development, policies which I currently practice in my school library. As a full time, certified school librarian, I am professionally responsible for selecting appropriate and quality books for my school's library. I am also responsible for culling the library collection - removing older, outdated, poorly circulated books to make way for books connected to our school's curriculum, classroom projects and students' personal interests. Occasionally, I am also responsible for addressing parental concerns about a book their child had selected. So far, we have had no issues resolving these concerns. Parents are able to understand why the book still has merit in the library, even though they would prefer their child borrow other books.

I am fortunate. I work in a school community with administrators who trust my experience and professionalism, and with families who are understanding and collaborative. However, I am not ignorant to the plight of other school libraries, including those in this state, who are less fortunate and are facing book bans and censorship. According to the American Library Association, book challenges have increased over 675% since 2020, nationwide. Libraries, whether public, academic or school, are designed to give free access to information, designed to allow for free thought and expression. When books are banned from these spaces, the core values of the library are violated. This bill will protect all Rhode Island school libraries from unnecessary censorship and will allow certified school librarians the authority to do what they are professionally trained to do - curate a library collection for their community, a privilege I am already granted.

I implore you to support House bill 5726, the Freedom to Read act, which not only outlines professional policies that should be standard, but also protects the core values of our libraries, and protects the professionals who are dedicated to supporting students and patrons' freedom to read.

Thank you for your consideration,

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