

Re: Support of H5727

April 3, 2025

Dear Chair Shanley and Members of the Committee:

I submit this testimony in strong support of H5726, the Freedom to Read Act. I am an educator teaching in the School of Social Work at Rhode Island College. I care deeply about education and intellectual freedom; this bill is vital for ensuring that our libraries provide access to diverse ideas without interference from narrow, ideologically driven interests.

Libraries have long been trusted to curate materials with care and expertise. Librarians are professionals, trained to understand the needs of their communities and to offer a broad, balanced selection of materials that represent a wide range of voices, perspectives, and experiences. Their decisions about what books belong in our libraries are based on principles of intellectual freedom, not the political or cultural agendas of any particular group.

Unfortunately, in recent years, we've seen an alarming rise in book banning efforts driven by certain parents, often motivated by homophobia, transphobia, or political ideology. These attempts to remove books—especially those that reflect LGBTQ+ experiences, or challenge conventional gender norms—are harmful not only to our children, but to the very foundation of our educational process. When we allow a small, vocal group to dictate what is and isn't permissible reading, we deny our children the opportunity to explore diverse ideas, engage with different cultures, and form their own beliefs.

The *Freedom to Read Act* would safeguard our libraries from these dangerous trends. It would ensure that library materials are selected by experts, not by individuals who seek to impose their personal biases on our children. We must trust teachers to educate our children, and we should trust librarians to curate the books they read.

I urge you to pass this bill, to protect the freedom to read, and to preserve the integrity of our libraries as spaces where all voices are heard, and where students are encouraged to think critically and independently.

Sincerely,

Wendy Becker, PhD, LICSW