

To: Clerk Steven Sepe, Rep Joseph Shekarchi, Christopher R. Blazejewski

From: Jennifer Sweet, *Agnes Little Elementary School Librarian, Pawtucket, and Exeter-West Greenwich School Committee Member*

Support of School Libraries Act

Date: April 20, 2025

Dear Senate Education Committee,

My name is Jennifer Sweet, and I am in FULL SUPPORT of the School Libraries Act, that would ensure that every public school has a full time librarian.

I am FULL SUPPORT of this bill because every child should have access to books in school, regardless of their socioeconomic status. As a school librarian in a Title 1 school district, I see kids struggle with so much. This is personal for me because I see students light up when they find a book that they can take home with them. I see kids relax when they come into my library because for many kids, it is their “safe-space.” I have students who act out and get in trouble in other classes, come into the library and thrive!

I, unfortunately, also feel very uneasy about the future of my library position in the Pawtucket School Department. At the end of last school year, the administration or cabinet as they refer themselves to, introduced a new STEAM program called PLTW (Project Lead The Way) in the elementary grades. At a meeting with all the Pawtucket School Department librarians at the beginning of the year, they informed us that we were responsible for teaching this program in our library classes for grades 1-3, with grades K, 4 and 5 to be implemented for the 2025-26 school year. We were given paid training over the summer, and told that we were to teach this in our library classes. Most of the librarians at this meeting expressed our concern that we were not science teachers, but in fact librarians who were required to get our Master’s degrees to acquire our positions. We were told that we were to teach PLTW and that it was “non-negotiable.” Some of these librarians are now teaching PLTW instead of holding library classes. This is so upsetting to me and a slap in the face after I spent so much of my time and money getting my Master’s degree to be a school librarian..

School libraries have ALL the information that every teacher needs, yet even though I reach out to teachers, they rarely come to me. We are the hub of the school... the glue that can hold us all together, yet we are treated as a separate entity, and this needs to change. Every school district in this country talks about how we need to focus on literacy, yet our school libraries are not staffed, under-staffed and under-funded. My school district does not even have a library curriculum. I tell my 5th grade students to

enjoy this last year of library classes because not one of Pawtucket's three middle schools has a librarian, because it has never been a priority to staff these positions. Now they are looking to possibly cut library positions and have the librarians run the PLTW program. State leaders need to take the helm and support the bill to guarantee a school librarian in every single school in Rhode Island. If our leaders are showing support, there is no telling the lasting impact this will have on our students' education and their futures.

When people ask me what I do for a living, I tell them that I have the BEST job in the world... an elementary school librarian. We ARE truly the heart of every school.

I am asking for you to support The School Libraries Act, our children are counting on you all.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jennifer Sweet

West Greenwich