



RHODE ISLAND FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AFT AFL-CIO

To: House Education Committee
From: Jeremy Sencer, Field Representative
Date: April 23, 2025
Re: **The School Libraries Act**

Testimony in **support** of **H 5488** (Representative Kislak, et. al.)

The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIFTHP) supports H 5488, the School Libraries Act. This legislation ensures every public school has permanent library space and access to a certified school librarian. Both are essential to student success.

Decades of research show that strong school library programs improve reading scores, graduation rates, and student motivation. Studies published in *Social Science Research* and reports from the Center for American Progress and Phi Delta Kappan confirm that these benefits are strongest in high-poverty schools and when librarians are integrated into instruction.

Unfortunately, many Rhode Island schools lack properly staffed or funded libraries. H 5488 addresses this problem by requiring every public school to maintain a dedicated, resourced library space. Schools with 250 or more students must employ at least one full-time certified librarian. Smaller schools must have at least a half-time librarian. The implementation timeline begins with high schools in 2026–27 and includes all K–12 schools by 2030–31, giving districts time to plan and prepare.

The bill also guarantees daily student access to the school library outside of scheduled classes. Secondary schools must offer before- or after-school hours. Certified librarians must be involved in planning these extended hours to ensure they meet student needs and are sustainably implemented.

Passing H 5488 will strengthen literacy, equity, and academic opportunity for all Rhode Island students. School libraries are not a luxury. They are a vital part of a 21st-century education that helps students become critical thinkers, skilled researchers, and lifelong learners.

We urge the House Education Committee to support H 5488 and take this important step to strengthen public education across the state.

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