

Dear House Education Committee,

My testimony that I am submitting to you here is in favor of H 5488, The School Libraries Act.

I am a retired teacher and school librarian having worked for 35 years in three Rhode Island school districts. It was my privilege to serve students in our schools and to provide them with high quality information resources and reading materials. School libraries are dynamic spaces where learning, exploration and discovery happen every school day. Guided by school librarians, students learn to become life-long learners and discover a love for reading. They learn how to become effective users of information and producers of their own ideas. We need the School Libraries Act to keep school libraries open so that students will continue to have access to this vital resource.

Over the years, I have been lucky enough to have helped students find and utilize sources for their research projects, taught them how to locate, evaluate, analyze and interpret sources and then to synthesize and communicate their ideas so that they could produce products that reflect their learning. I have guided students to discover books and authors that become their favorites and inspire them to read more. I have brought in authors and guest speakers to my school library and to classrooms to engage students in their learning and to make it come alive. I have engaged students with books through book clubs, all-school read programs, readers' cafés, book award voting and more. These are the activities that school librarians make happen in every school where a school library and school librarian is found.

But school libraries are not supported across the board in all schools and all Rhode Island school districts. In Providence, where I served as a high school librarian for 23 years, I have seen support for libraries dwindle over the years. Library staffing has been cut in our large, comprehensive high schools that serve over 1,000 students. Elementary librarians are stretched so that they serve multiple schools throughout the course of their weeks. Libraries have been closed or cut to being open for only half the week or less. In other districts elementary librarians have been cut so that schools effectively do not run school libraries. Even some high schools do not have full-time librarians. Without libraries and school librarians, our students miss out.

And our students deserve better. They deserve school libraries where they are free to explore and discover their passions. They deserve books that reflect their interests, their identities, their experiences and books that provide windows to other cultures and other possibilities. They deserve school librarians who provide them with books, resources and learning experiences so that they become life-long learners and life-long readers.

Please pass the The School Libraries Act for the future of our school libraries and for all of our students.

Sincerely,
Peter Quesnel
Providence
District 13