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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT/AMEND

TESTIMONY ON 25-H 5488, RELATING TO EDUCATION – THE SCHOOL LIBRARIES ACT April 23, 2025

The “statement of policy” in this bill lays out the importance of school libraries to students and their role in a democratic society. Their additional role in promoting freedom of inquiry and access to a diversity of views and viewpoints cannot be overstated. The ACLU of Rhode Island therefore supports this legislation for recognizing the key goal of school libraries in promoting the academic, social, and intellectual growth of young people.

However, we would urge consideration of one minor amendment to the bill in order to avoid any potential misinterpretation of its objective.

Specifically, Page 3, lines 1-3 requires that the school library’s collection of books be such that “every student is offered a range of choices to meet their reading interests and reading level *and that also supports the teaching and learning priorities of the school.*” While we understand the purpose of the italicized language, we are also very cognizant of the wave of censorship battles facing public school libraries both here and across the country. We are concerned that this language might inadvertently be used by would-be censors to seek the removal of books from school libraries on the grounds that they do not “support the teaching and learning priorities of the school.” This misinterpretation could be avoided by making a minor tweak, such as suggested below:

(1) A collection of books and reading materials that is adequate in size for the student population of the school in order that every student every student is offered a range of choices to meet their reading interests and reading level, and that also includes materials that support ~~supports~~ the teaching and learning priorities of the school.”

Again, we believe passage of this legislation would send an important and positive message about the state’s interest in having an informed, curious and knowledgeable citizenry from an early age, but we also encourage consideration of the suggested amendment proposed above.

Thank you for considering our views.