

To: **House Committee on Education**  
Representative Joseph A. McNamara, Chair  
Representative Thomas E. Noret, First Vice Chair  
Representative Rebecca M. Kislak, Second Vice Chair  
Committee Members

From: Cheryl Space  
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Youth Services Coordinator, Community Libraries of Providence

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RE: Support for House Bill 7417

Community Libraries of Providence (CLPVD) strongly supports the *Save Rhode Island School Libraries Act* (House Bill H7417), currently before the House Education Committee. This legislation would ensure that every public school in Rhode Island has a permanent, dedicated library space and a certified school librarian to serve students. School libraries are a key element in a child's education, ensuring that students have access to current and accurate information resources and to professional librarians who educate students on how to find, use and navigate those resources and information tools, and these skills provide lifelong benefits.

For more than 25 years, research has demonstrated that students with access to high-quality school library programs achieve higher academic outcomes, demonstrate stronger reading proficiency, and develop critical research and information literacy skills.

School librarians are highly trained education professionals who complete specialized graduate-level preparation in research instruction, digital literacy, collection development, and curriculum integration—they are not interchangeable staff members. After years of reductions in staffing and resources, too many school library programs are now struggling to remain viable. We respectfully suggest that legislative discussions would benefit from a fuller understanding of this rigorous training, ensuring that policy decisions accurately reflect the expertise required to serve students effectively.

As community members and fellow education professionals, we urge the Committee to recognize that strong school library programs are not optional enhancements, but critical infrastructure supporting student success and educational equity. Senate Bill S 2078 would ensure that every Rhode Island public school has a dedicated library and a certified librarian, directly addressing these challenges and strengthening opportunities for all students.

For the past three years, our Youth Services team has collaborated closely with Providence Public School Librarians on our Connected Libraries project, funded by United Way of RI. The goal of our project is to build communication and relationships among library professionals in order to share resources, ideas, and professional development to develop a library ecosystem that supports students and families in and out of school time. The Providence School Librarians are professionals who are dedicated to their students. We've learned about so many of their inspiring initiatives: a stellar student-run news team; Battle of the Books; robotics challenges; media literacy; creative makerspaces; information literacy; and inspiring learning centers that encourage reading, exploration, and discovery. They bring their students to the public library to get library cards and to learn about all of the programs available to them after school and on the weekends. This year, three Providence School Librarians are meeting their students and their families at our public libraries to encourage intergenerational use of our free programs and services. Despite their creativity and determination, the school librarians struggle with low (or nonexistent) budgets to build their collections and some librarians serve multiple schools. There are many brand new libraries in Providence Schools that shine; we need to ensure that the professional librarians leading these school hubs are supported so that students thrive!

H7417 is about educational equity, literacy, and responsible investment. Ensuring that every Rhode Island public school has a dedicated library space and a certified librarian strengthens academic outcomes, supports teachers, and most importantly prepares students to navigate an increasingly complex information landscape. We respectfully urge favorable consideration of this important legislation.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical issue and for your ongoing commitment to the well-being and success of Rhode Island's youth and families.