

March 8, 2026,

To the Rhode Island House Education Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support for The Save Rhode Island School Libraries Act H 7417 which mandates that students attending Rhode Island public schools have access to a school library staffed by a certified school librarian. Librarians are no longer just keepers of books; they are essential instructional partners who teach students how to navigate an increasingly complex digital landscape.

Every Rhode Island student deserves the support of a full-time, certified school librarian and a well-funded library program. While the RI Department of Education's Basic Education Plan (BEP) Standard L-4 technically requires these programs, it lacks the necessary safeguards to prevent local districts from dismantling them. Currently, many districts circumvent the BEP by slashing staff or reducing library hours to just a few per week—effectively shuttering these hubs of learning. This inconsistency has created a profound equity gap: while some students receive information-literacy training, others are denied even the most basic access to resources. We must move beyond 'suggestions' and mandate these positions to ensure every child has an equal shot at success.

I am writing today not just as a constituent, but as a mother who has seen the 'library effect' in action. My children are currently thriving in college because they were taught how to think, not just what to read. Their PK-12 librarians gave them the tools to distinguish fact from bias and to navigate complex academic databases with confidence. Seeing them become frequent, capable users of both their university and local public libraries makes me realize how lucky they were—and how unfair it is that other Rhode Island children are being denied that same preparation. H 7417 ensures that every child has the same head start my children had.

Decades of research confirm a direct correlation between full-time, certified school librarians and improved English Language Arts (ELA) scores, higher graduation rates, and a genuine joy in learning. As highlighted in [Investing in School Libraries and Librarians to Improve Literacy Outcomes](#) (Otero Martinez, 2024), over 50 years of data show that students with access to well-resourced libraries consistently outperform their peers on academic assessments. In our current era of AI and rampant misinformation and disinformation, librarians are the frontline educators teaching the critical media literacy skills students need to navigate the world. For many, the school library is the only place where they can choose their own books and develop a lifelong love of reading. We must recognize certified school librarians not as a 'bonus,' but as an essential component of every Rhode Island school.

Please vote to support The Save Rhode Island School Libraries Act H 7417.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Michelle Steever". The signature is written in a dark grey or black ink on a plain white background.

Michelle Steever, 126 Lyndon Rd, Cranston, RI 02905
Rhode Island certified School Librarian since 2002.
Rhode Island Library Board member.