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Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the publishing industry, we write to express our strong support for **S 2078, The School Libraries Act**. This legislation represents a thoughtful and research-backed investment in student literacy, educational equity, and the long-term economic vitality of Rhode Island.

Literacy as the Foundation of Academic Success

A robust body of research demonstrates that well-funded school libraries staffed by certified school librarians contribute measurably to improved student outcomes. Students in schools with strong library programs consistently show higher reading proficiency, improved standardized test scores, and higher graduation rates. These gains are particularly pronounced when students have access to a wide range of age-relevant, interest-driven reading materials and the guidance of trained professionals who can connect them with the right books at the right time.

Literacy is the foundation of all academic achievement. Students who read proficiently by the end of elementary school are more likely to succeed in middle and high school, complete postsecondary education or training, and enter the workforce prepared for skilled employment. School libraries serve as the central access point for both print and digital resources, ensuring that students from all backgrounds, regardless of household income, have equitable opportunities to develop strong reading habits and critical thinking skills.

The Role of Certified School Librarians

Certified school librarians play a uniquely important role in this ecosystem. In addition to fostering a love of reading, they teach information and media literacy, skills that are indispensable in today's knowledge-based economy. The ability to evaluate sources, synthesize information, and communicate effectively are not only academic competencies but core workforce skills demanded by employers across industries.

By strengthening school library infrastructure and ensuring professional staffing, this legislation helps prepare students to participate fully in civic life and to compete in a rapidly

evolving labor market. Professional librarians ensure that collections are current, diverse, and aligned with student learning needs, maximizing the educational return on public investment.

Economic Development and Workforce Readiness

The economic implications of strong literacy outcomes are substantial. States with high-performing educational systems attract businesses seeking a skilled workforce. Literacy correlates with higher lifetime earnings, increased productivity, and reduced social service expenditures. Investment in school libraries is, in practical terms, an investment in human capital development.

Students who graduate with strong reading and research skills are better prepared for higher education, technical training, and career advancement. Over time, this translates into a more competitive state economy, greater tax revenue stability, and stronger communities.

Equity and Lifelong Learning

School libraries promote educational equity by ensuring universal access to books and digital resources, regardless of a student's socioeconomic background. For many students, the school library is their primary or only reliable access point to high-quality reading materials.

Moreover, school libraries foster lifelong reading habits. Students who develop sustained engagement with books become adults who value learning, cultural participation, and informed citizenship. This strengthens communities, supports local economies, and reinforces the broader educational and cultural ecosystem.

S 2078 establishes clear, reasonable standards to ensure that every public school has both a dedicated library space and access to certified library professionals. It affirms that access to books, information, and guided research is not a luxury, but an essential component of a high-quality education.

We urge passage of The School Libraries Act. Better school libraries benefit students, communities, and the state's economy.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Penguin Random House
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Hachette Book Group