

To: RI House of Representatives

From: Sheila D. Conway

Support Letter: Save Rhode Island's School Libraries Act – House Bill 7417

March 10, 2026

Dear Committee Chair and Committee Members:

I am writing in support of the Save Rhode Island's School Libraries Act – House Bill 7417. I am a former public school library media specialist; I am certified via the Rhode Island Department of Education, and I hold a Master's in Library & Information Studies. I know that students benefit when they have access to a school library that is fully funded and staffed with a professional library media specialist.

Students benefit from the use of school libraries in many ways, one example is that they can retain information when they are exposed to experiences that reinforce what they are being taught in the classroom; quality library programming can provide students with this kind of opportunity. Students who have opportunities to visit a school library before school, during the day, and after school are able to intrinsically take ownership of their education and seek out information that is meaningful to them. They are able to exert some independence and make decisions about the information that they need to complete research assignments and/or to develop personal interests that motivate them to become lifelong learners. Students can successfully do this with the guidance of a school librarian through access to information, technology, quiet learning spaces, and spaces where collaboration can occur with small group and large group instruction.

I have experience working in public schools with 500+ students when there was access to library programming 5 days per week and I worked in other schools with the same number of students, when there was access to library programming 2.5 days per week, therefore I have seen how inequitable it is to provide some students with exceptional library services while other students are provided with limited library services. School culture and learning opportunities improve when school libraries are open, and accessible to all students each day of the week. Please support House Bill 7417 and help our public schools to address learning disparities through the use of equitable library programming, with qualified staff, adequate resources, and safe, healthy library spaces.

Respectfully,

Sheila D. Conway, MLIS, JD

*Sheila D. Conway*

East Providence, Rhode Island