

House Finance – HB749 – Support

Hello, my name is Beth Gorter, I live in North Kingstown, and I work as a school librarian at George R. Hanaford Elementary School in East Greenwich. I'm the Communications Director of the East Greenwich Education Association and a member of NEARI.

For the past 17 years, I have been passionate about providing high-quality education and guiding students through an ever-changing world while fostering a love of lifelong learning. I became a school librarian to share my love of books, knowledge, and information with children. Over the years, I have helped hundreds of students become stronger readers, more proficient with technology, and more critical thinkers.

However, in the last five to ten years, my job has become exponentially more challenging—not because of the work I was trained to do, but because of the increasing demands placed on educators. Like many of my colleagues, I have taken on additional roles beyond my responsibilities as a librarian. As behavioral and mental health crises among students rise, I often find myself acting as a behavior support specialist or stand-in guidance counselor. At the same time, the number of qualified professionals in our schools has declined due to chronic budget cuts and inadequate pay.

Our students deserve an exceptional education—one that we, as trained educators, are committed to providing. But each year, that mission becomes more difficult. Our schools are already underfunded, struggling to hire and retain essential staff, including educators, substitutes, and support personnel. If these proposed budget cuts go through, students will lose access to critical programs and resources that are fundamental to their education.

Among the first positions to be eliminated in times of financial strain are school librarians—a pattern we have seen repeatedly, including in East Greenwich. Certified school librarians are vital to public schools, playing an essential role in developing students' literacy, research skills, and critical thinking. Unlike a general classroom teacher or volunteer, certified librarians are specifically trained to curate diverse, high-quality resources, teach digital literacy, and foster a love of reading in students of all levels. They empower students to evaluate information, navigate technology responsibly, and become independent learners—skills that are more important than ever in today's digital world. Librarians also provide crucial support to teachers by collaborating on research projects, supplying instructional materials, and ensuring access to up-to-date information that enhances classroom learning.

Beyond academics, school librarians create inclusive, welcoming spaces that support students' emotional and social development. In an era of rampant misinformation, they teach students how to distinguish fact from fiction and use technology responsibly. As budgets shrink and staff reductions increase, losing certified librarians means losing a critical support system for both students and teachers—one that fosters curiosity, inquiry, and a lifelong love of learning.

We love our students. We do our best for them every day. **But we need your help.** Please do not allow these cuts to move forward. **I urge you to support House Bill 5749** or incorporate its provisions into the education budget. This legislation would help districts like mine, which are already facing reductions in state aid, continue to provide the education that all children deserve.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Rhode Island's students.

Sincerely,

Beth Gorter