



**RHODE ISLAND
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS** AFT
AFL-CIO

To: House State & Government Elections Committee

From: Jeremy Sencer, Field Representative

Date: April 3, 2025

Re: **Freedom to Read Act**

Testimony in Support of **H 5726** (Representative Morales, et. al.)

The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIFTHP) supports H 5726, the Freedom to Read Act. This bill is essential to protecting intellectual freedom, preventing censorship in libraries and schools, and ensuring that students and the public have access to a diverse range of books and ideas.

Across the country, there has been a troubling rise in efforts to ban books and censor educational materials based on political or ideological objections. These efforts threaten the fundamental rights of students, educators, and librarians. H 5726 ensures that professional educators and librarians, not political pressure, determine the appropriate materials available in public and school libraries.

This legislation upholds First Amendment rights by preserving libraries as spaces of free inquiry and access to information. It prevents political censorship by making clear that books cannot be removed based on an author's identity, a book's perspective, or ideological disagreement. It supports librarians and educators by protecting their professional discretion and shielding them from civil or criminal liability when acting in good faith.

H 5726 also establishes a fair, transparent process for reconsidering materials, ensuring that any challenges are reviewed through a professional lens rather than arbitrary demands. Importantly, it protects public and school library funding from being reduced in retaliation for adhering to these protections. Finally, the bill provides critical legal recourse for students, parents, educators, authors, and publishers in cases of unjust censorship, reinforcing Rhode Island's longstanding commitment to academic freedom and democratic values.

This legislation will safeguard the integrity of Rhode Island's libraries and schools, ensure that professional judgment is prioritized over political influence, and protect students' rights to explore diverse perspectives. It offers clear, enforceable standards that promote transparency, fairness, and educational excellence. By passing this bill, Rhode Island affirms its commitment to the First Amendment and to the educators and librarians who serve our communities every day.

We urge the House State Government and Elections Committee to support this legislation and take a strong stand for intellectual freedom, professional integrity, and equitable access to knowledge.

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