



**Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education**

Organizational Testimony in Support of SB 2078

March 4, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

The Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE) submits this testimony in strong support of S 2078, The School Libraries Act.

ARISE was founded by Southeast Asian refugees and descendants to advance education justice and youth leadership across Rhode Island. Our communities know firsthand that public education is not simply about academic outcomes — it is about belonging, access, and opportunity.

School libraries are not optional amenities. They are equity infrastructure.

Research consistently shows that schools with well-funded libraries and certified school librarians see higher reading achievement, stronger graduation rates, and deeper student engagement. But beyond metrics, libraries are often the first place in a school where young people encounter themselves in books — where immigrant, refugee, multilingual, and marginalized students find stories that reflect their lives.

For many of the Southeast Asian and immigrant youth we work with, the school library is one of the only spaces that offers quiet, safety, and self-directed exploration. It is where students develop a love of reading, build confidence, and learn to see themselves as thinkers and researchers.

In an era defined by misinformation, disinformation, and algorithm-driven media ecosystems, certified school librarians play a critical role in teaching information literacy and media literacy. Young people must learn how to evaluate sources, identify bias, and responsibly navigate digital information. These are not secondary skills — they are foundational to democratic participation and college and career readiness.

S 2078 recognizes this reality by ensuring that every public school has a permanent, dedicated library space and a certified school librarian. It also establishes a phased timeline to guarantee equitable staffing across high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools. This matters deeply for students in under-resourced districts, where library services are often the first to be cut.

Educational equity cannot exist without equitable access to books, technology, and trained professionals who guide students in how to use them.

We are especially supportive of the bill's requirement that students have daily access to their school library beyond scheduled "library class" time. Libraries should be living spaces within schools — places for independent reading, research, community gathering, and exploration — not locked rooms or repurposed storage spaces.

For immigrant and refugee families, education has always been a pathway toward stability and collective advancement. Ensuring that every school in Rhode Island has a fully functioning library staffed by a certified librarian affirms that all students — regardless of zip code — deserve access to high-quality learning environments.

S 2078 moves Rhode Island closer to a vision of public education that centers literacy, critical thinking, and equitable opportunity.

We urge you to pass The School Libraries Act.