

EveryLibrary Institute
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Senate Committee on Education
c/o Debbie Hayden, Committee Clerk
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI. 02903

RE: Written Testimony in Support of S2078 (2026), The School Libraries Act – March 3, 2026

Dear Chair Gallo and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

On behalf of the EveryLibrary Institute NFP, a national non-profit public policy organization focused on library funding, governance, and public access to information, we respectfully submit this written testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 2078, The School Libraries Act of 2026.

The EveryLibrary Institute works nationally with state and local education stakeholders to strengthen school library policy through evidence-based legislation. S2078 represents a carefully structured and research-aligned framework that recognizes school libraries as essential components of student achievement, literacy development, and college and career readiness.

The policy findings articulated in the bill are firmly supported by decades of empirical research. Over the past twenty years, multi-state and longitudinal studies have consistently demonstrated that schools with well-funded library programs staffed by full-time certified school librarians show measurable gains in student reading achievement, higher standardized test scores, and improved graduation rates. These outcomes remain significant even when controlling for poverty and demographic variables. The strongest results are observed where certified librarians provide both access to diverse collections and direct instruction in information and media literacy skills. The evidence base supporting professional school library staffing is substantial and consistent.

By embedding these findings into statute, the General Assembly establishes a clear educational purpose for the Act and provides durable guidance for future implementation. The bill is a smart policy framework that recognizes that staffing alone is insufficient without adequate infrastructure. It clearly defines “school librarian” as a certified teaching professional, “school library” as a permanent and dedicated facility supervised by that professional. Around the country, other successful school library-focused statutes provide similar definitions to reduce administrative ambiguity and support uniform compliance.

We see S2078 positioning schools for education success. School library programs should have a collection that is adequate in size and scope for the student population, and each space should have a mix of instructional, technology, and reading spaces. The Act establishes essential program elements aligned with national professional standards. These requirements ensure that school libraries function as instructional environments integrated into the academic mission of the school, rather than as ancillary spaces.

The staffing provisions, which are central to the effectiveness of the Act, are similar in scope to current practices in states that have similar requirements. Requiring at least one full-time certified school librarian in schools with 250 or more students, and proportional staffing in smaller schools, reflects widely recognized professional standards and aligns with research findings linking full-time staffing to improved student outcomes. The phased implementation timeline demonstrates fiscal and operational prudence. By staging requirements through the 2031–2032 school year, the legislation allows for budget planning, workforce preparation, and orderly compliance without disruption.

S2078, the School Libraries Act represents a consultative, research-informed, carefully structured approach to strengthening literacy, information competency, and academic performance across Rhode Island’s K-12 schools. It establishes clear standards, phased implementation, and equitable access while supporting the state’s long-term educational objectives. In our opinion, the Act is consistent with national best practices in school library policy and aligns with research demonstrating that professional library staffing and infrastructure are associated with improved student achievement and graduation outcomes.

For these reasons, the EveryLibrary Institute respectfully urges the Senate Education Committee to advance S2078.

Thank you for your consideration.

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