

Dear RI Speaker of the House Shekarchi, House Majority Leader Blazejewski, Representative Handy, and Clerk Sepe:

My name is Kathleen Lynch and I am writing in support of S2078 The School Libraries Act.

I have worked in public schools as a school librarian since 2011. I am a RIDE certified school library media specialist and alumna of URI's Graduate School of Library and Information Science (an ALA accredited program).

Every Rhode Island student should have the support of a full time, certified school librarian and access to well funded school libraries. The Basic Education Plan (BEP), written by the RI Department of Education (RIDE), requires schools to provide library media programs but does not adequately safeguard library programs from being cut by local school districts. Many school districts have ignored the BEP and have made cuts to library programs and library staff, including closing school libraries. Such action denies students access to learning resources that school libraries and certified school librarians provide, creating an equity issue in the state.

When I began my career as a school librarian, I was split between two elementary school buildings. This meant that I worked some days at one school, and then traveled and worked at another school for several days. Some days I worked in one school, traveled during my 30 minute lunch period, and immediately started working for the second half of the day at the second school. For the last 12 years, I have been privileged to work at one elementary school, full time. Working in one school allows a librarian to connect with their students, faculty, and staff. It allows relationships to build, and for the librarian to become a true resource for the entire school community. This year, due to "budget cuts", our district decided to split librarians between schools. I spend one day, each week at the middle school, away from my elementary school. The difference between what I have been able to do in the past and what I am able to do this year is glaring.

Decades of research show a correlation between schools with full time certified school librarians and English language arts test scores, graduation rates, and enjoyment in learning. According to the article Investing in School Libraries and Librarians To Improve Literacy Outcomes (Otero Martinez, 2024), more than 50 years of research show that students with access to well-resourced school libraries with certified school librarians consistently perform better academically and score higher on standardized assessments. School Librarians teach media and information literacy skills, increasingly important skills in an age of misinformation and disinformation. For many students, the school library is their only source for selecting the books they want to read, encouraging them to become life-long readers. School libraries staffed by full time certified school librarians must be essential components of every Rhode Island school.

Please vote to support S2078 The School Libraries Act.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kathleen Lynch

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