

Dear Members of the RI House and Senate:

I am writing to express my support for **S 2078, The School Libraries Act**. This legislation marks a critical step forward in ensuring that every student in Rhode Island has equitable access to the essential resources provided by a dedicated library space and a certified school librarian.

With each passing year, our educational landscape becomes increasingly complex. School libraries have evolved from a room full of books to classrooms teaching critical skills needed to become college- and career-ready. As outlined in the "Statement of Policy" within this act, school libraries are centers for instruction regarding information and media literacy. In an era of misinformation and fake news, our students need the expertise of certified school librarians to learn how to identify, evaluate, and ethically use information. These are not just academic skills; they are fundamental requirements for participating in our current landscape.

The School Libraries Act addresses inequities that have plagued districts for decades:

- **Space:** By requiring a permanent, dedicated library space in every public school, the bill ensures that visiting the library is part of the educational experience rather than a luxury. Having a space for teaching, learning, checking out books, and relaxing brings joy to a student's school day.
- **Certified Teacher-Librarians:** The requirement for certified school librarians ensures that collections are professionally vetted and maintained and that students receive instruction from a qualified and certified School Library Media Specialist.
- **Proven Results:** Decades of research, including a study by Dr. Elizabeth Coker in 2015, found that the five-year graduation rate from schools with a high-quality library program was at 85%, compared to 79% in schools lacking adequate library programming.
- **Return on Investment:** The State of Rhode Island has spent \$40 million on the Science of Reading/Right to Read Act. S 2078 ensures these investments are supported by a collection of reading material and certified librarians. Librarians and libraries support these initiatives.

For our students to be truly college and career ready, they must have daily access to high-quality technology, excellent instruction by certified librarians, and a large and inclusive book collection.

I urge the Committee to support S 2078 and invest in the long-term academic success of Rhode Island's students.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Mills Cranston, RI