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Testimony from Lexie Thompson, The Womxn Project, in support of the Freedom to Read Bill (H7386)

I am writing in support of H 7386, the “Freedom to Read” initiative, designed to ensure that mere differences in taste are not allowed to impair the ability of libraries in RI to offer materials they deem valuable to RI citizens.

Other states have seen movements develop that seek to block access to this or that kind of material in libraries, and in some cases those movements have been successful. One of the key features of a vibrant democratic and egalitarian society is the unfettered access to information.

Opposition to books and similar materials is generally based on content and further, based on content that clashes with some dogmatic position they hold. Libraries should be repositories of information that allows one to learn about such dogmatic positions and learn how to question and critique dogmas. Those promoting restricting access to certain kinds of knowledge or ideas do so precisely to the degree that those materials challenge their ideas. Libraries should hold material that can offend folks who hold any dogmatic position.

There have to be books that are irreverent, blasphemous, sarcastic, and critical. Books that expose the injustices in our past and presents and those that support the status quo. Library materials should both provoke and comfort, disturb, and reassure, lead to sadness, laughter, and insight.

Individuals are free to pick books that confirm their biases or confront them. But no one should be allowed to restrict access to books because they disagree with their content. Censorship has never led to a better society. Not in the past and certainly will not in the future.

Respectfully,
Lexie Thompson
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