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# In Wake of Court Losses, Rhode Island Codifies ‘Right to Read’

By Sam Spratford | Jul 11, 2025



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The Rhode Island State House in Providence.

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Rhode Island governor Dan McKee signed into law the Freedom to Read Act on July 2, joining a growing number of states such as New Jersey, Maryland, and Minnesota in codifying their citizens’ right to read amid nationwide book bans. The law contains protections for school and local librarians and staff and is, notably, the first to guarantee writers and readers a right to sue for censorship, according to PEN America.

The bill passed after a months-long campaign by a coalition of librarians, authors, and community members, including the Rhode Island Library Association, the Authors Guild, the American Booksellers Association, PEN America, and Penguin Random House.

The win comes as more freedom-to-read activists and state legislatures are pursuing

proactive right-to-read legislation as an alternative to litigation, in the wake of demoralizing losses. On May 23, the Texas Fifth Circuit Court dismissed the free speech claims in the high-profile book banning case *Little v. Llano County*, reversing an earlier ruling that ordered the local library branch to return titles they had removed to the shelves.

Legislation like Rhode Island’s serves as a bulwark against rogue decisions like these, which advocates say flew in the face of longtime precedent. Rhode Island Freedom to Read Act “aligns with the existing legal standards for obscenity, and requires following best practices without imposing financial penalties on libraries,” said PEN America in a statement. The law also protects librarians’ professional decisions about their collections against criminal prosecution.

PEN America has documented a spike in book bans since 2021, with over 10,000 bans in the 2023-2024 school year alone. “As the Trump administration

and book-banning groups continue their attacks on libraries and free speech, we urge legislators nationwide to make their states safe havens for the freedom to read," said PEN state policy manager Laura Benitez. "You can never be too prepared to stop book bans."

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