NJ State Board of Education:

Good afternoon. My name is Bonnie Lafazan, and I am a lifelong resident of New Jersey and of Springfield NJ since 2007. I am the proud parent of Aidan, a 6th grader at who attends our middle school, FMG, and Evan, 2nd grader who attends our Pk-2nd grade school, Edward V. Walton School. For the past 10 years I have also been Director of the Berkeley College Library in Woodbridge NJ and have been involved professionally in the NJ Library community, current as a board member of Library Link NJ, a library cooperative and currently serve as the NJLA/CUS President (which is the New Jersey Library Association’s College and University section). I also serve on the Dean’s Advisory Council to Rutgers University’s School of Communication and Information.

I come to you today both as a NJ resident parent and as an experienced librarian professional with my strong support of A132 / S2933 which requires instruction on information literacy in curriculum of students in grades kindergarten through 12.

AND

A1995 / S2394 which requires a specific ratio of certified school library media specialists to students in New Jersey public schools

Both of these bills would be critical to the success of students across the state of NJ and especially in my district of Springfield NJ in Union County which does not have a certified school library media specialist employed in four of our five school buildings. There is no certified media specialist/school librarian at Edward V. Walton, our PK-2nd grade school, no certified media specialist/school librarian at our 3rd-5th grade schools, Sandmeier and Caldwell, and no certified media specialist/school librarian at our middle school, FMG.

This is a terrible disservice to our students. The books and other materials are outdated and not representative of our diverse community. Our children are missing the opportunity to have a love of reading developed and nurtured by a dedicated, knowledgeable professional. School library media specialists promote literacy and inspire a lifelong love of reading, by connecting teachers and students with a wide variety of materials that encourage growth and knowledge. Instead, my son at the elementary school, along with his peers, visits the school library, staffed by teacher aides only 2x/month during his recess (a time when he’d much rather be outside playing), and my other son, along with his peers at the middle school, have absolutely no reason to step into the library which is called the IMC—“Instructional Media Center”—which is quite ironic since there is no library instruction or media instruction of any kind taught there. The only reason the students enter the IMC is at their own will to see an IT staffer to handle any tech issues, should they arise. There are no information literacy or technology instruction sessions taking place, no book clubs, no Makersday events, no “One Book One School” program, no Battle of the Books competitions, and no other collaborative programs or lessons that a vibrant library with a media specialist would offer. Additionally, without a dedicated school library media specialist, the burden of teaching information literacy, digital citizenship, research & technology falls on our teachers, who already have so much on their plates. As Berg, Malvey and
Donohue point out in *Without Foundations, we can’t build: Information literacy and the need for strong library programs* (http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/strong-school-library-programs/) “at the Middle School level, it becomes nearly impossible for classroom or subject teachers to provide adequate instruction in these areas, because as students begin conducting research in nearly all of their subjects, the level of expertise required to guide a student through the modern research process requires a true information professional. “

**My children should have access to a school library media specialist** who is dedicated to their school building so that they can have the same experiences and access as their peers across the state receive.

**My children should have a required information literacy curriculum** so that they are obtaining the same skill set as their peers when entering college.

Certified school library media specialists prepare students for success in college and careers by teaching the research, information, media, and digital literacy skills required for 21st century achievement. As an academic librarian for the past ten years, I have witnessed first-hand that students who come from districts that lack a strong library program are struggling when they get to college to be brought up to the foundation necessary for college level research. They struggle understanding basic concepts such as Boolean operators, keyword searching and the difference between a primary and secondary source; thus, causing them to be at a disadvantage when assigned college-appropriate level research papers which require the basic information literacy skill-set. Myself and my colleagues spend way more time covering basis research skills when these students should be learning advanced skills such as major-specific database searching and using data and information legally and ethically.

Berg, Malvey and Donahue (http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/strong-school-library-programs/) state that “the absence or poor utilization of a certified School Library Media Specialist may have a deep, direct impact on K-12 students and those students who eventually pursue higher education as they will lack the ability to analyze information credibly, use information ethically or conduct inquiry based research in order to seek information. The lack of strong information literacy foundation at an early age is often impossible to correct at the high school or college library level, which puts these students, my children, and others throughout the state at a complete disadvantage. ..in preparing them for college and the workforce.

If these bills are to pass - bills that would ensure a dedicated librarian per ratio of students and a required information literacy curriculum, my district would be required to provide what our children deserve, and what so many districts around us already offer. I have already spoken, along with other parents and residents at my district’s Board of Education meetings, urging them to consider hiring a school media specialist in each of our schools. Our superintendent is perfectly content with having only one dedicated school media specialist at the high school. If the school library media specialist requirement bill was enacted, his model would have to change and our advocacy efforts would no longer be turned away with a blind eye. ..and most
importantly our children would have the same equitable access to the high quality school library programs they deserve!

With our fast-paced and rapidly changing digital world, it is of critical importance that students in our K-12 schools who are developing their core foundations of information literacy skills and foundations of reading, writing and technical skills, have a strong school library program taught by a certified school library media specialist, along with a required information literacy curriculum throughout their K-12 years.

I urge you to support these two bills to ensure that ALL of our students will be successful lifelong learners and ethical and confident users and creators of information in all formats.

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