

ALA Statement on Book Censorship

The American Library Association opposes widespread efforts to censor books in U.S. schools and libraries

CHICAGO - Due to a dramatic uptick in book challenges and outright removal of books from libraries, ALA's Executive Board and the Boards of Directors for all of ALA's eight divisions have released the following joint statement regarding attempts to remove materials that focus on LGBTQIA+ issues and books by Black authors or that document the Black experience or the experiences of other BIPOC individuals:

In recent months, a few organizations have advanced the proposition that the voices of the marginalized have no place on library shelves. To this end they have launched campaigns demanding the censorship of books and resources that mirror the lives of those who are gay, queer, or transgender, or that tell the stories of persons who are Black, Indigenous or persons of color. Falsely claiming that these works are subversive, immoral, or worse, these groups induce elected and non-elected officials to abandon constitutional principles, ignore the rule of law, and disregard individual rights to promote government censorship of library collections. Some of these groups even resort to intimidation and threats to achieve their ends, targeting the safety and livelihoods of library workers, educators, and board members who have dedicated themselves to public service, to informing our communities, and educating our youth.

ALA strongly condemns these acts of censorship and intimidation.

We are committed to defending the constitutional rights of all individuals, of all ages, to use the resources and services of libraries. We champion and defend the freedom to speak, the freedom to publish, and the freedom to read, as promised by the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States.

We stand opposed to censorship and any effort to coerce belief, suppress opinion, or punish those whose expression does not conform to what is deemed to be orthodox in history, politics, or belief. The unfettered exchange of ideas is essential to the preservation of a free and democratic society.

Libraries manifest the promises of the First Amendment by making available the widest possible range of viewpoints, opinions, and ideas, so that every person has the opportunity to freely read and consider information and ideas regardless of their content or the viewpoint of the author. This requires the professional expertise of librarians who work in partnership with their communities to curate collections that serve the information needs of all their users.

In 1953, when confronted with comparable threats to our democratic values, the American Library Association issued the Freedom to Read Statement, a declaration in support of freedom to think or believe as one chooses, the freedom to express one's thoughts and beliefs without fear or retaliation, and the right to access information without restriction. ALA's Executive Board, staff, and member leaders reaffirm not only the principles of the Freedom to Read statement but also the daily practices that ensure it continues to inform the profession and that library workers and library trustees have the training, information, tools, and support they need to celebrate and defend their communities' right to read and to learn.

With the freedom to read under threat, the ALA, including its Executive Board, Divisions, Roundtables, and other units stand firmly with our members, the entire library community, allied organizations, and all those across this country who choose to exercise their own right to read and access information freely, and we call on others to do the same.

*American Library Association Executive Board
American Association of School Librarians Board of Directors
Association of College and Research Libraries Board of Directors
Association for Library Service to Children Board of Directors*

The American Library Association's (ALA) Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF) is actively involved in providing confidential legal guidance and strategic support to libraries and library professionals in communities across the country impacted by the recent surge in book challenges. From June 1, 2021, to September 30, 2021, OIF has tracked 155 unique censorship incidents, and provided direct support and consultation in 120 of those cases. "We're seeing an unprecedented volume of challenges in the fall of 2021," says Deborah Caldwell-Stone, OIF's Director. "In my twenty years with ALA, I can't recall a time when we had multiple challenges coming in on a daily basis."

Established December 1, 1967, the Office for Intellectual Freedom is the premier advocate for the First Amendment right to read in libraries.

OIF and ALA divisions and offices provide tools and resources for libraries, including challenge support (<https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport>); consulting and training (<https://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/oif/consulting>); and awareness campaigns like Banned Books Week (<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks>) and the annual Top 10 Most Challenged Books (<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/top10>) list. Other support for library workers facing book challenges include the LeRoy C. Merritt Humanitarian Fund (<https://www.ala.org/aboutala/affiliates/relatedgroups/merrittfund/merritthumanitarian>), devoted to the support, maintenance, and welfare of librarians whose employment is threatened because of discrimination or because of their defense of intellectual freedom. A clearinghouse of resources is available on ALA's Fight Censorship (<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/fight-censorship>) page.

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