



June 6, 2023

Statement from the Oregon Library Association and the Intellectual Freedom Committee

RE: Materials Challenges and Intellectual Freedom

In December 2021, the Oregon Library Association (OLA) and the Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC), with input from the OLA Equity Diversity Inclusion and Anti-Racism Committee, issued a [joint statement](#) condemning the current wave of book challenges and censorship attempts occurring at schools and libraries across the State of Oregon and the country. Since then, censorship attempts have continued to rise at an alarming rate. The IFC and OLA are reaffirming our stance, supporting libraries and schools in continuing to protect the First Amendment rights of all library users.

The materials that have most often been targeted for restriction or removal include topics specific to the [2SLGBTQIA+](#) experience or on subject matters that relate to race, racism, or the experiences of the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) community.

The bulk of current challenges have been traced to groups pursuing a special-interest, political agenda that seeks increased control over the ideas and information available to minors, particularly in school and library settings. We see concerned parents being manipulated by disinformation and co-opted into a coordinated effort that threatens the core American values of free expression and free access to ideas. These threats result in muting the voices of historically marginalized groups, just as these communities are finally beginning to gain fair representation in library collections.

The ninth principle within the ALA Code of Ethics states:

“We affirm the inherent dignity and rights of every person. We work to recognize and dismantle systemic and individual biases; to confront inequity and oppression; to enhance diversity and inclusion; and to advance racial and social justice in our libraries, communities, profession, and associations through awareness, advocacy, education, collaboration, services, and allocation of resources and spaces.”

Libraries have a duty to provide resources that ensure equitable service to and representation of the diverse groups and perspectives of their communities. As explained in the ALA’s [EDI Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#), “All community members will feel truly welcomed and included when they see themselves reflected in collections that speak to their cultures and life experiences... Socially excluded, marginalized, and underrepresented people, not just the mainstream majority, should be able to see themselves reflected in the resources and programs that libraries offer.”

Further, many of these challengers have used cyberbullying and personal intimidation tactics toward libraries and individual library workers. Some of the tactics have included social media campaigns designed to mobilize support for censorship rather than sensitivity and critical thought, attending board meetings with the intent of aggressively requesting immediate action regarding library materials, and personally attacking individual library workers, including posting their personal information, photos, and phone numbers on social media. The IFC condemns the use of intimidation and extralegal means aimed at censorship which are antithetical to ALA's [Freedom to Read statements](#).

We recognize the role of parents/guardians to make reading and viewing choices for their children, but that right only exists on an individual basis. Individual parents do not have a right to make those choices for others. Blanket restrictions imposed by government or school officials that are applied to all readers remove the right from individual parents to make choices for their own children. The vast majority of books challenged are not on mandatory reading lists, but simply exist in the library. The proper response to objectionable materials in the library is to not read them, or not let your child read them. Removing or restricting materials for all readers violates the rights of parents/guardians to make those same choices for their children.

In sum, the IFC supports parents' involvement in education and guidance in media selections for their own minor children, but we stand firmly behind our [Library Bill of Rights](#) and the Freedom to Read statements and against overarching actions which violate the First Amendment rights and dignity of others. Libraries have a core responsibility to uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and to stand up against censorship, regardless of the age, background, race, gender or any other characteristic of the reader, and the IFC supports our school and public library efforts to protect these freedoms. The OLA and IFC reaffirm the [ALA Statement on Book Censorship](#) and support all Oregon libraries in their efforts to protect materials from censorship, especially the voices of the oppressed and marginalized.

The IFC supports the undeniable right of all readers, regardless of age, background, gender, sexual orientation, or race, to information with a full range of ideas, opinions, concepts, topics and thoughts, and calls on parents, educators, administrators, and board members to resist attempts to censor materials. Of course not every book is right for every reader, but the right of every reader to read what they choose must be honored.

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IFC Chair 2022-2023

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This statement comes from the Oregon Library Association (OLA) and OLA's Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC), with input and support from the OLA EDI and Antiracism Committee. OLA is a professional organization of Oregon library workers. The IFC provides expertise and support for intellectual freedom issues on behalf of OLA and is the professional committee with the charges to support intellectual freedom and to respond to censorship. OLA in combination with IFC supports Oregon school and public libraries in managing challenges to materials within their library collections.