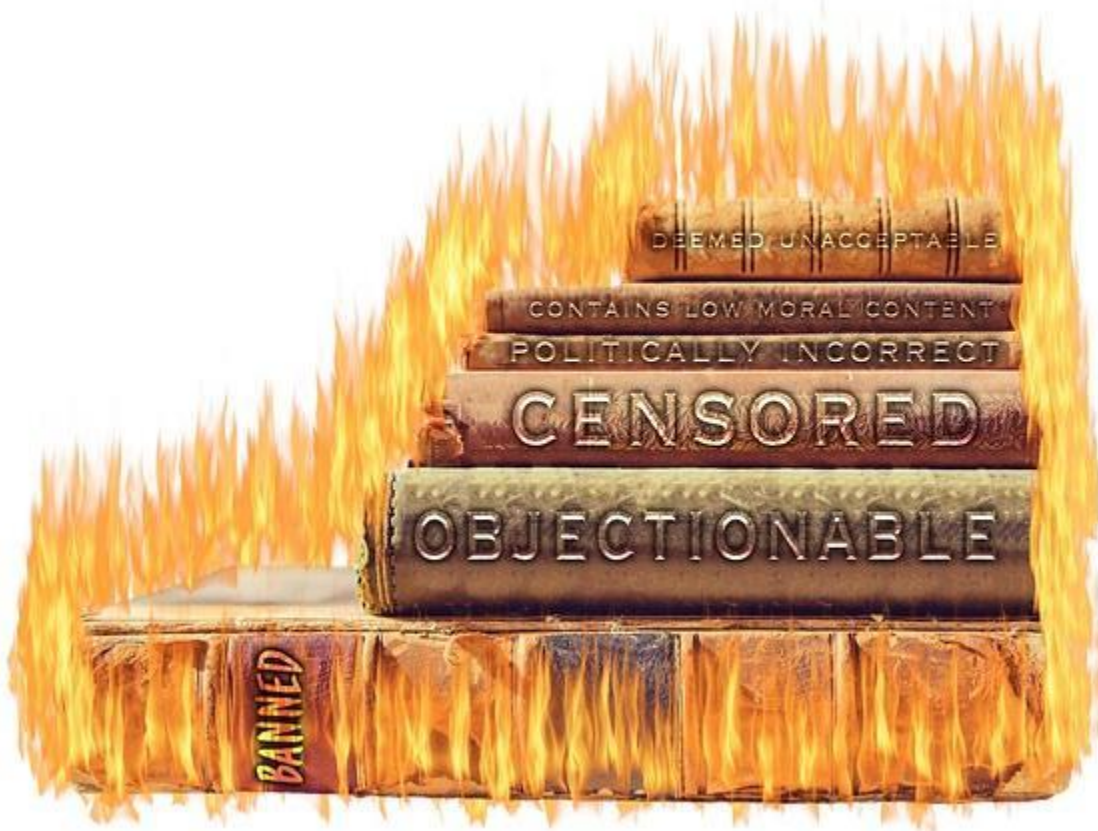


Giannoulas To Libraries: We're United Against Banning Books

by Henry Haupt
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SPRINGFIELD - Amid coordinated efforts throughout the nation to ban books from library shelves, Illinois Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulas has drafted first-in-the-nation legislation designed to support public and school libraries and librarians as they face unprecedented censorship of books and resources in Illinois.



The legislation comes after extremist groups – including the far-right nationalist group, the Proud Boys – have targeted Illinois libraries, divided communities and harassed librarians across the country, even though the books are not required reading for anyone.

Giannoulas, who serves as the State's Librarian, reiterated his staunch support for Illinois librarians who not only deserve our gratitude, but also must have safe environments in which to work. Giannoulas argued that book banning undermines First Amendment rights, threatens individual freedoms and liberties and prevents the public from accessing reading materials of their choice.

"This is an alarming phenomenon that's occurring throughout the nation, including Illinois, which is designed to polarize and disrupt our communities," Giannoulas said. "This scourge of censorship has a chilling effect on our democracy. These efforts have nothing to do with books. Instead, they are about ideas that certain individuals disagree with and believe no one should think, or be allowed to think."

In delivering his State of the State address last month, Illinois Governor JB Pritzker spoke out about book banning and censorship. He recently announced his support for Giannoulas' legislation.

"In Illinois, we don't hide from the truth, we embrace it and lead with it," said Governor Pritzker. "Banning books is a devastating attempt to erase our history and the authentic stories of many. Students across this state deserve to see themselves reflected in the pages of stories that teach and entertain. I'm proud to support House Bill 2789 and ensure that Illinois' libraries remain sources of knowledge, creativity, and fact."

Under [House Bill 2789](#), sponsored by State Reps. Anne Stava-Murray (81st District – Downers Grove) and Carol Ammons (103rd District – Champaign) and State Sen. Laura Murphy (28th District – Elk Grove Village), Illinois libraries would only be eligible for state funded grants, which are issued by the Secretary of State's office, if they: 1) demonstrate that they adhere to the [American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights](#) indicating reading materials should not be removed or restricted because of partisan or personal disapproval; or 2) issue a statement complying with the policies of the State Library or one prohibiting the practice of banning books or resources.

Stava-Murray's suburban district includes Community High School District 99 in Downers Grove, which withstood efforts led in part by the Proud Boys group.

"Downers Grove has seen first-hand what some groups will try to do to prevent access to books that contain language or ideals that they disagree with," State Rep. Stava-Murray said. "Librarians and educators are dedicated to their schools and communities and serve out of a love of knowledge, reading and helping people. It's absurd to think that groups would seek to harass them and create animosity in our communities by driving cultural wedges in an effort to divide them."

“As a legislator assigned to several education-related committees, this issue is very important to me,” said State Rep. Ammons. “The books these groups are targeting are overwhelmingly those written by or about people of color or LGBTQ individuals. We must fight to allow the public greater access to reading and learning materials, not restricting access by banning books.”

“This radical movement to ban books cannot be allowed in the state of Illinois – the state in which Ray Bradbury, the author of *Fahrenheit 451* – a book that chronicled the dangers of censorship, book bans and book burning – called home,” said State Sen. Murphy. “Coordinated campaigns to banish books run contradictory to the principles our country was founded upon. Our First Amendment protects not only our rights to speak but the right to access resources from the school or public library that are free from censorship that comes from disapproval by select individuals or groups who dislike a book’s content.”

Currently, Illinois law does not contain language related to book banning or eligibility for state grants that restrict access. Last fiscal year, the Secretary of State’s office awarded 1,631 grants to Illinois libraries totaling more than \$62 million. Of those, 97 percent of the grants were awarded to public and school libraries, with public libraries receiving 877 grants and school libraries securing 712 grants.

According to the Chicago-based American Library Association (ALA), there were 67 attempts to ban books in Illinois in 2022, increasing from 41 the previous year.

“Public libraries are committed to serve their communities with books and resources, programming, and other services,” said Cynthia Robinson, Executive Director of the Illinois Library Association. “Serving the community means serving everyone in the community. Not every book is for everyone, and library staff are always ready to help library users find the right book for themselves or their children. Parents are encouraged to make decisions for their own families, but not for other families. Banning books takes crucial resources away from those who need them.”

New restrictions not only challenge an individual school system or library, but legislation in certain states is aimed at eliminating the availability of certain books in schools and libraries all together. In neighboring Missouri, state lawmakers passed a law that empowers prosecutors to arrest, assess fines and even jail school librarians who fail to monitor books in their libraries.

Nationally, the number of attempts to ban books has been rising, with 681 attempts involving more than 1,600 titles throughout the U.S. in 2021, according to the ALA. This is the most attempts to ban books since the ALA began tracking these numbers 20 years ago.

If approved, HB 2789 would take effect January 1, 2024.

Additional Support for HB 2789:

“The efforts by certain radical groups to ban books is aimed overwhelmingly toward silencing people of color,” said **Teresa Haley, President of the NAACP Springfield Branch and NAACP Illinois State Conference President**. “These same groups have been oppressed and victimized through countless discrimination policies, such as book bans, that attempt to silence us and erode the rich contributions of Black Americans in our country. We must act now!”

“**The Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE)** actively seeks to protect the First Amendment rights of Illinois students by opposing censorship and book banning in all forms. It is the purpose of school libraries - and the duty of formally trained school library staff - to meet the needs of every student by providing materials that allow for differences in expression. AISLE endorses the belief that exposure to a wide

variety of perspectives and the unfettered exchange of ideas is necessary to preserve the freedoms guaranteed in a democratic society. Students of all ages should be allowed the freedom of choice to select from a wide range of materials that are appropriate for their individual age, ability, and family’s values.”

“As a union of educators, we feel strongly that it’s our duty to defend the right to read and access information freely for all Illinoisans,” said **Dan Montgomery, President, Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT)**. “Our libraries serve as the town square, the home of our democracy. That’s why we fully support HB 2789 and thank Secretary of State Giannoulis and the sponsoring legislators for this smart and clear policy that will help libraries protect that critical access to books and knowledge that our children and all citizens need now more than ever. “

"The freedom to read is literally written into our Chicago Public Library mission. After all, libraries are for everyone, and inherently democratic and inclusive of our diverse stories," said **Chicago Public Library Commissioner Chris Brown**. "As one of the most diverse cities in the country we want those in Chicago and beyond to know we will continue to protect our freedom to read, and have declared our 81 libraries as Book

Sanctuaries. We're proud to have a Secretary of State so committed to this most democratic freedom.”

"As a librarian for 13 years, I know that access to a wide range of reading materials is essential," said **Elizabeth Lynch, librarian at Addison Public Library**. "This is about our fundamental rights. Democracy requires an informed public and equal access to information that reflects a wide range of views. That's why I strongly support House Bill 2789."

As a public library director, I firmly support everyone's right to equal access to information," said **Summer Griffith, Director of the Lincoln Library in Springfield**. "This includes technology and digital equity, access to arts and cultural events, and also books and ideas. As a parent of school-aged children, I fully understand not every book is for every kid or family, but denying others the right to read or think is inherently against our shared value of freedom of thought.

"If a parent doesn't want their child to read a particular book, they have the right to choose not to read that book and guide their children accordingly," said **Josephine Tucci, Director of the Lincolnwood Public Library District**. "They should not be making decisions for other people's children. Libraries make every effort to break down barriers and provide access to information, not build up walls to make access to information more difficult. Library users have all the power to CHOOSE what they want to read and what they don't want to read. It's that simple."

"Libraries are institutions that should be available to everyone to explore and discover the world around them," said **Christine Gerrish, Executive Director of the Glen Carbon Library**. "They depend on diverse collections and the ability of their patrons to browse them without fear of being judged. One of the main goals of banning books is to silence the voices of marginalized people. The act of banning books threatens all library services which is why I support House Bill 2789."

"The First Amendment provides a clear and equitable standard for building library collections that uphold the freedom to choose for ourselves what we read," said **Heidi Smith, Executive Director of the Highland Park Public Library**. "It would be impossible to build a book collection with the goal that everyone in a community agrees with and wants to read every book. The flaw in the idea that every library book must reflect the values, experiences, and beliefs of a community is that a community is made up of unique individuals. Our individuality is a community strength that our books must reflect. Thank you to our legislators for working to support our freedom to read in Illinois."

"I represent a small, diverse community in the St. Louis Metro area and it is my responsibility for my library's collection, programs, and services to meet the needs of ALL of the members and tax payers of the community I serve," said **Ashley Stewart, Director of the Caseyville Public Library District**. "Censorship is not a partisan issue. It is an organized effort by a very small percentage of our population that are specifically targeting libraries. My library board and staff received hateful messages and threats for an event held during PRIDE month. Can you imagine if zoo or museum staff were threatened over the types of animals held or works of art displayed at their respective institutions? That is why I fully support the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights, which provides the foundation for House Bill 2789, a noble goal that seeks to prevent censorship from plaguing our libraries and patrons."