

First-In-The-Nation Legislation To Prevent Book Bans Approved By General Assembly

by Henry Haupt
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SPRINGFIELD - Landmark legislation designed to prevent book banning passed the Illinois Senate, Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias announced today.

HB 2789, which now awaits the Governor's signature, sets a nationwide precedent in the fight against book bans, as libraries and librarians face unprecedented censorship of books and resources, including in Illinois. The bill passed the Illinois House in March.

Giannoulas, who also serves as the State Librarian, initiated HB 2789 after extremist groups – including the far-right nationalist group, the Proud Boys – targeted Illinois libraries, divided communities and harassed librarians, despite that the books are not required reading.

“The concept of banning books contradicts the very essence of what our country stands for,” said Secretary Giannoulas. “It also defies what education is all about: teaching our children to think for themselves. This landmark legislation is a triumph for our democracy, a win for First Amendment Rights, and a great victory for future generations.”

House Bill 2789, sponsored by State Rep. Anne Stava-Murray (81st District – Downers Grove) and Sen. Laura Murphy (28th District – Elk Grove Village), allow Giannoulas' office to authorize grant funding only to libraries that adhere to the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights states that reading materials should not be removed or restricted because of partisan or personal disapproval, or that issue a statement prohibiting the practice of banning books or resources.

Currently, Illinois law does not contain language related to book banning or the eligibility for state grants if a library bans items from its collection. Last fiscal year, the Secretary of State's office awarded 1,631 grants to Illinois libraries totaling more than \$62 million. Of those, 97% 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.

Nationally, the number of attempts to ban books has been surging. According to the ALA, last year more than 2,500 different books were objected to, compared to 1,858 in 2021 and just 566 in 2019.

The scourge of censorship has migrated to the Midwest. In states neighboring Illinois, legislative efforts have been made to remove books from libraries, punish librarians and defund libraries for simply having the wrong book on a shelf.

- In Missouri, lawmakers passed legislation that can jail or fine school librarians who provide students with certain books, and its House of Representatives voted to cut all library funding in the state's annual budget for the upcoming fiscal year.
- In Iowa, the governor's proposed education bill contained measures to remove books from school libraries.
- In Indiana, the Legislature passed House Bill 1447, which requires schools to publicly post their library catalogs and establish procedures to allow parents and community members to file challenges to books they believe inappropriate. The bill also bars public school employees from using a book's educational value as a legal defense against charges that they distributed harmful material to minors.

Illinois is taking a different path, working to unite libraries and protect librarians who have come under assault for simply striving to serve the needs of their respective communities.

If signed into law, HB 2789 would take effect on January 1, 2024.