The Right to Learn
Combatting Classroom Censorship

ACLU Massachusetts
First book banned in the United States:

- Quincy, Massachusetts!
- The New Canaan by Thomas Morton
- Banned in 1637
- Contained harsh critique of Puritan customs and power structures
2022: Unprecedented censorship attempts demands to censor library books and resources, according to the ALA

Almost twice 2021
Attempts to Restrict Access to Books in 2022

An attempt may include challenges to multiple titles

Source: American Library Association -- Office for Intellectual Freedom
36 states introduced book-banning bills
137 bills introduced nationwide
Who initiates book challenges?

- 30% Parents
- 28% Patrons
- 17% Political/Religious Groups
- 15% Board/Administration
- 3% Librarians/Teachers
- 3% Elected Officials
- 4% Other (includes non-custodial relatives, nonresidents, community members without library cards, etc.)

Source: American Library Association -- www.ala.org
Where do challenges take place?

- 48% Public Libraries
- 41% School Libraries
- 10% Schools
- 1% College Libraries / Other Public Institutions

Source: American Library Association -- www.ala.org
Massachusetts 2022

45 attempts to restrict access to books in MA

57 book titles challenged in MA
Top 13 Most Banned Books 2022

- Gender Queer
- The Bluest Eye
- Lawn Boy
- Crank
- Me and Earl and the Dying Girl
- This Book Is Gay
- A Court of Mist and Fury
- Out of Darkness
- A New York Times Bestseller
- The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian
- The Perks of Being a Wallflower
- A Court of Thorns and Roses
Rights and Legal Issues

- Equality based on race, national origin, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation

- Free speech rights, including the right to receive information

- Diversity in Education as a Bedrock of Democracy
Ludlow, Mass.

- Proposed policy - any new or replacement library materials are subject to prior review and approval by the Superintendent and, after public input, the School Committee.

- Extremely vague, overbroad, and repressive standards for allowable materials

- Banned materials with “sexualized content” – undefined

- School district employees who do not follow the policy could be terminated.

- Copycat of a Pennsylvania county policy
These images could have been banned under the proposed Ludlow policy.
“Under this proposed policy, images and descriptions of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden would be categorically banned from elementary school library materials, and librarians seemingly could be fired for choosing to introduce elementary students to the joy of ballet by showing them male ballet dancers performing the Nutcracker.

We urge the Ludlow School Committee to reject this proposed policy, and hope other local officials take note. Such policies undermine students' right to receive an accurate, inclusive education and pave the way for unlawful discrimination.”
Ludlow community members spoke out and the Ludlow School Committee declined to adopt the proposed policy.
ACLU and GLAD letter to Superintendents and School Committees
Online Toolkit

aclum.org/en/exercise-your-right-learn

- Right to Learn Toolkit
- Resist Book Bans
- Resist Other Restrictive Policies
- Know Your Rights: Back to School
- Advocates Academy
Take Action!

SD. 2673
An Act regarding free expression

The bill ensures that public and school libraries can offer diverse and inclusive books, media, and materials without political interference.

https://mobilize.aclum.org/a/tell-state-lawmakers-protect-students-right-learn
Thank you!

Laura Rótolo
Lrotolo@aclum.org