



STRONG LIBRARIES = A STRONGER MICHIGAN

MICHIGAN LIBRARY ADVOCACY DAY



APRIL 25, 2023 AT THE MICHIGAN STATE CAPITOL BUILDING

TALKING POINTS - Intellectual Freedom

The Michigan Library Association (MLA) actively advocates and educates in defense of intellectual freedom and the right to read.

Intellectual Freedom forms the bedrock for freedoms of expression, speech, and the press and relates to freedoms of information and the right to privacy. Intellectual Freedom is guaranteed by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Viewed as an integral component of a democratic society, intellectual freedom protects an individual's right to access, explore, consider, and express ideas and information and forms the basis for a self-governing, well-informed citizenry.

Intellectual freedom is a core value of the library profession. MLA works to protect Michiganders' right to read, oppose attempts to ban books from Michigan libraries, educate the public about the right to read, oppose any legislation that infringes upon Michigan citizens' First Amendment rights and ensure that librarians across Michigan will be entrusted (and not criminalized) to continue to do their jobs and serve the needs of ALL individuals and communities. We believe that while a specific book may not be the right fit for one person, it may still be the perfect fit for another. No one individual or group should make sweeping decisions to remove books from libraries, taking the process of careful consideration away from the experts and that choice away from readers.

Book banning has a long history throughout the world. When a book is challenged or banned, someone is trying to decide what is best for everyone else based on their own beliefs and feelings. Banning books means a narrowing worldview. Banned books are actually some of the best books to read because they offer new perspectives and insights from people with different life experiences. Many books currently being targeted are those written by and about traditionally marginalized people and experiences including LGBTQIA+, BIPOC and women.

Banning children from being able to see different cultures, same sex couples, and languages in books, closes their world. When books are banned, it sends a clear message that certain ideas are not acceptable in society. A society in which banning books is acceptable is no longer a free society. Censorship weakens education and prevents people from learning to think for themselves.

Censorship is nothing new. However, the volume of attempted censorship efforts and extremist rhetoric we are witnessing across our nation, and here in Michigan, is unprecedented. We are living in tumultuous times, and we believe the proponents of removing books from library shelves are trying to further divide our country by turning political disagreements into a culture war. While every individual has a right to challenge a book, we are seeing a coordinated and orchestrated attempt by political organizations and well-funded advocacy groups to remove books about racism, sexuality, gender, and history. Even the threat of censorship creates an environment of fear that leads to restrictions on access to information.

Key findings from a March 2022 study conducted by Hart Research Associates and North Star Opinion Research on behalf of the American Library Association found that a large majority of voters (71%) oppose efforts to have books removed from their local public libraries. Most voters and parents hold librarians in high regard, have confidence in their local libraries to make good decisions about what books to include in their collections, and agree that libraries in their communities do a good job of offering books that represent a variety of viewpoints.

MLA opposes any restrictions to access which may include:

- banned books, book burning, and challenges to literature
- censorship in any form
- self-censorship by authors, editors, journalists, or library material selectors
- measures that diminish net neutrality
- government information and freedom of information laws