

TO: ALA Council

DATE: January 5, 2024

RE: (select one)

ACTION REQUESTED

X INFORMATION

X REPORT

ACTION REQUESTED/INFORMATION/REPORT: (add below)

Report: ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee (CD#19)

Information: Freedom to Read Statement Task Force Report (CD#19.1)

Action requested from Councilors is to cast their vote to: (if applicable)

None. One information item.

ACTION REQUESTED BY: (add committee name)

N/A

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**ALA INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM COMMITTEE
REPORT TO COUNCIL
2024 LIBLEARNX MEETING
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND**

The ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC) is pleased to present this update of its activities and the activities of the Office for Intellectual Freedom since the ALA Annual Conference in June, 2023:

FREEDOM TO READ STATEMENT REVISION TASK FORCE

The Freedom to Read statement is a statement that supports intellectual freedom as expressed in the Library Bill of Rights, elaborating upon principles I. – V in the Library Bill of Rights. It was first written in 1953 in response to a wave of censorship attempts related to anti-communism. It was drafted at a conference sponsored jointly by American Library Association and the American Book Publishers Council. The statement rallies libraries and publishers in taking a firm stand against censorship.

Since 1953, the statement has been revised four times, though none of the revisions significantly altered the statement. In 1972, revisions were made to ensure the document addressed universal attempts at censorship, rather than a focus on anti-communism. In 1991, revisions were made to make the statement gender inclusive. In 2000, revisions were made to ensure the statement reflected censorship attempts related to internet content. In 2004, revisions were made to better reflect political realities post-September 11, 2001.

In 2022, members of the Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC) and American Library Association leadership recommended the formation of a task force to review the Freedom to Read Statement. The recommendation was based in part on the length of time since the statement was last reviewed and the recent surge in book banning in schools and libraries across the United States.

At the IFC meeting held during American Library Association Annual Conference 2023 in Chicago, Illinois, Committee Associate Johannah Genett presented a plan to revise the Freedom to Read Statement (see attachment A) that had been approved by IFC Chair Lesliediana Jones. The first phase of the potential revision was focused on membership engagement. The purpose of this phase was to engage American Library Association members on the themes of the Freedom to Read statement and offer an opportunity for members to provide feedback on what changes may be needed to the statement. Publishers and other co-signatories to the statement were specifically not engaged in this first phase because it is important to first gauge American

Library Association members' appetite for a revision prior to engaging with co-signatories in the publishing world and embarking on a revision of the Freedom to Read Statement.

Having successfully completed the first phase of the Freedom to Read Statement review, the Task Force has recommended three separate possible actions:

- Refrain from revising the Freedom to Read Statement. In addition to general support for leaving the statement unchanged as a document still relevant in current times, members expressed concerns that elected bodies governing libraries may not approve a revised Freedom to Read Statement or that revisions proposed by co-signers may not reflect the values of the profession or the ALA.
- Undertake light revisions of the Freedom to Read Statement, focusing on four areas of concern: the need to issue a stronger call to action to members of the public; acknowledging attacks on historically underrepresented groups and the efforts to exclude materials intended to assure that library collections meet the needs of a diverse community; better address digital formats and challenges to access; and revise and improve outdated language concerning materials for youth that will directly support youth access.
- Consider alternate formats that will make the statement readily accessible to the public and library workers, including a plain language version, a "teen" version, and/or a graphic novel version.

The Intellectual Freedom Committee will take up and review the Task Force's report in the coming months and recommend any proposed actions to Council at its Annual Meeting in San Diego, California.

The Task Force's full report is attached as CD#19.1.

IFC PRIVACY SUBCOMMITTEE

Since July 2023, the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee's Privacy Subcommittee has been meeting monthly via Zoom, focusing on a range of initiatives concerning library privacy. The Subcommittee's efforts span a wide range of activities, from educational outreach to the update and development of practical toolkits and guidelines. These initiatives reflect the subcommittee's commitment to addressing the evolving challenges and opportunities related to library privacy and intellectual freedom. Our continued work aims to strengthen the library community's ability to safeguard these fundamental values in an increasingly digital world.

This includes the involvement of members of the subcommittee in the Vendor and Library Community of Practice. Recent efforts with the Community of Practice include carrying out an online discussion series and collaborating with vendors to address shared privacy concerns.

The subcommittee members are also tracking developments concerning FISA Section 702, including monitoring legislative proposals related to Section 702 and considering their potential impact on library privacy and intellectual freedom and connecting with the Committee on Legislation (COL) to determine next steps.

The subcommittee is also committed to addressing privacy concerns associated with artificial intelligence and exploring the impact of AI on privacy, and plan to produce information for the broader library community on the impact of generative AI on the library community. For example, library vendors, particularly vendors offering services to both library and non-library industries, have already begun to change their privacy policies to account for their use of artificial intelligence and user data. We need to provide information about how to identify and handle these changes.

The subcommittee is also updating the document “Guidelines & Checklist for Public Access Computers and Network,” and initiated work on developing resources to support access to reproductive health information. It is also planning a Data Privacy Week blog series for January 21-27 that will aim to educate and raise awareness about data privacy in libraries by sharing the ALA resources that exist.

During LibLearnX, members of the subcommittee will present "Upholding Trans Patron Privacy & Information Access."

BOOK CHALLENGES AND NEW SUPPORT RESOURCES

Through December 15, OIF has received over 1100 reports from across the United States documenting demands to censor library books, programs, and displays; or requests for assistance from library workers and community members seeking to prevent the adoption of local policies or state mandates intended to halt access to books for young readers or substitute the judgment of untrained laypersons for the professional curation of a librarian. The majority of book challenges continue to center on books by or about LGBTQIA persons and their concerns and experiences, or on books by or about Black persons and their lives, concerns and experiences.

OIF staff remain deeply engaged in their mission of supporting library workers and library supporters who are challenging censorship in their communities. In addition, OIF staff are working to document the full range of challenges currently faced by libraries and library workers by compiling data about threats and harassment directed at libraries and library workers, including calls to close or defund libraries, threats of criminal prosecution for providing books and resources to minors, and library workers' loss of employment for defending users' access to

books targeted for censorship. Of course, the OIF staff continues to track demands to censor library books and resources. OIF staff report that complete data for 2023 will be available in late February or early March of 2024.

The Intellectual Freedom Committee and the Office for Intellectual Freedom continue to work cooperatively with the Office of Public Policy and Advocacy and Chapter Relations, members of the ALA Policy Corps, committees of Council, and the Communications and Marketing Office to counter the unprecedented censorship campaign being conducted by political advocacy groups. In addition to the regular work of these groups, Unite Against Book Bans continues to grow as an anti-censorship initiative and coalition.

In addition, OIF staff, with the support of IFC members, past and present, are implementing three new initiatives in 2024 to support library workers, administrators, and trustees. First, coordinated through the Office for Intellectual Freedom, a coalition of more than 60 publishers has agreed to produce book resumes for titles currently targeted for censorship. These title-level defense resources will be available to librarians and educators addressing demands to censor books; the Unite Against Book Bans website will serve as the host and hub for accessing the book resources. Second, to broaden the availability of individual support for librarians and communities addressing censorship of library resources, OIF is working with a group of member leaders to support the creation or expansion of state-wide intellectual freedom challenge support networks that will provide peer-to-peer confidential assistance to librarians navigating local threats to intellectual freedom, with referral to OIF as appropriate. Finally, a revival of the Lawyers for Libraries and Law for Librarians professional development program will provide continuing education to lawyers, library professionals, and library trustees that is focused on fostering detailed understanding of the laws and court cases that support access to library services and the defense of library users' intellectual freedom and privacy.

UNITE AGAINST BOOK BANS

[Unite Against Book Bans](#), ALA's ongoing grassroots advocacy initiative, continues to expand its programming and outreach. Throughout the fall of 2023, the UABB campaign communicated with individual advocates and coalition partners, conducted educational programs to advance its mission in defense of the freedom to read, and supported anti-book ban advocacy by UABB partners.

Included in these activities were directed calls to action that encouraged UABB supporters and local residents to communicate with decision makers to share their support of intellectual freedom in libraries. These calls to action were sent on behalf of community organizers, library alliance groups, partner organizations, and more and targeted over 25 communities across the country.

UABB also supported its partner organizations' advocacy campaigns. A particular highlight was UABB virtual program conducted with UABB partner First Book / Diverse Books for All that highlighted First Book's evidence-based white paper documenting how the availability of diverse literature supports children's educational success. UABB also partnered with the Writers Guild on an Instagram-based banned books read out that featured prominent screen and stage actors and supported banned bookmobile campaigns sponsored by Penguin Random House and The Nation that distributed frequently banned and challenged books to interested readers and raised awareness of the harms of censorship.

In October, Unite Against Book Bans and ALA joined forces with the New York Public Library, a UABB partner, on their Books for All campaign. Taking place from October 2023 through June 2024, Books for All provides free materials for participation in a Teen Book Club, including access to four e-books and a toolkit; a Teen Writing Contest; and virtual events with authors.

With the support of members of the ALA Policy Corps, the UABB presented programs on advocacy at library meetings across the country, including conferences held by ARSL, AASL, and the South Carolina Library Association.

Currently, there are 213 Unite Against Book Bans partner organizations. 94 partners are national organizations and 119 are state and local organizations, including several state chapters of the American Library Association.

BANNED BOOKS WEEK

Banned Books Week remains an essential part of ALA's advocacy and outreach in defense of intellectual freedom. The 2023 event received more major press and social media attention than in previous years, tied to the increased public awareness about censorship issues in schools and libraries. The current organized censorship campaign has also boosted interest and participation in the event, facilitating additional collaboration with partners such as the members of the Banned Books Week Coalition and Unite Against Book Bans partners, including major publishers.

The 2023 event received no small amount of interest because of the honorary chairs selected by the Coalition: actor and advocate LeVar Burton and Da'Taeveyon Daniels. Burton had several major press appearances, recorded a video in support of the first-ever Banned Books Week day of action, and participated in a well-received live virtual program that drew on his longstanding role as host of PBS' Reading Rainbow and his celebrity as an actor. Da'Taeveyon Daniels, a high school senior who leads two [Student Advocates for Speech](#) chapters in Texas, is at the forefront of student advocacy and is a passionate champion of student rights and intellectual freedom.

In addition to programming featuring authors, librarians, and advocates, the 2023 Banned Books Week featured a specific day of action: Let Freedom Read Day on October 7, which focused on encouraging readers and advocates to engage in discrete and easily achievable actions against censorship. Suggested actions included calling a decision maker; borrowing a banned book and thanking local librarians; attending a board meeting; and joining Unite Against Book Bans as an individual member or as an organizational member. Members working with OIF, UABB and the Banned Books Week Coalition plan to make Let Freedom Read Day a regular feature of Banned Books Week.

In closing, the Intellectual Freedom Committee thanks the division and chapter intellectual freedom committees, the Intellectual Freedom Round Table, the unit liaisons, and the members of the OIF staff, recognizing the tireless work of the Office for Intellectual Freedom and the Freedom to Read Foundation. In particular, we thank Deborah Caldwell-Stone, Joyce McIntosh, Karen Gianni, Eric Stroshane and Betsy Gomez for their support of our members and colleagues who are fighting censorship and other challenges to intellectual freedom in their communities.

Respectfully Submitted,

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