



Legislation Text

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The official copy considered by the City Council is the first reader copy.

City of Baltimore
Council Bill **R**
(Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Torrence
At the request of: The Administration

Resolution Entitled

A Council Resolution concerning
Baltimore United Against Book Bans
For the purpose of condemning book bans in public schools and libraries.

Whereas, the City Council of Baltimore City recognizes that intellectual freedom and the unfettered exchange of ideas are foundational to American democracy.

Whereas, reading is fundamental and a skill that is critical to life-long learning.

Whereas, the written word, in the form of books and other publications, is necessary for learning about complex issues and obtaining exposure to new ideas, cultures, and backgrounds.

Whereas, school-aged children, in particular, deserve to see themselves and their backgrounds reflected in the publications available to them in public schools and libraries.

Whereas, there has recently been an exponential increase in the number of book bans in public schools across the United States, with an increase of 33% in the last academic year alone.

Whereas, in the first 8 months of 2023, attempts were made to challenge or censor over 1900 books in public libraries across the country. The vast majority of these titles were about or by individuals of color, women, and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Whereas, books that have been targeted include The Diary of Anne Frank, Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye, Angie Thomas's The Hate U Give, Patricia McCormack's Sold, and Maia Kobabe's Gender Queer: A Memoir.

Whereas, the movement to ban books also includes deceptive attempts to present a whitewashed narrative of history by prohibiting content that presents the factual history of subjects like slavery and the experience of Native Americans.

Whereas, the organization Moms for Liberty, which seeks to ban books it deems "offensive" and limit the discussion about race and LGBTQ+ identities in schools, has recently started targeting Maryland counties; in September 2023, Moms for Liberty led the charge for Carroll County remove 56 books from its public school libraries.

Whereas, historically, book bans have been used to eradicate books that shine a light on issues facing minorities and women. In the 19th century, book bans targeted publications critical of the institution of slavery; a Black minister in Maryland was sentenced to ten years in prison for owning a copy of abolitionist author Harriet Becher Stowe’s novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In the early 20th century, book bans were used to outlaw publications educating the public about contraception. And, in the Jim Crow era, the Daughters of the Confederacy was successful in their mission to ban textbooks that did not espouse the false “Lost Cause” narrative of the Civil War that they sought to perpetuate.

Whereas, this pattern continues in the choice of the works that are targeted as part of the latest wave of Orwellian attacks.

Whereas, a recent NPR-Ipsos poll revealed that more than 60% of Americans oppose banning books or restricting conversations regarding issues involving race, gender, and sexuality in schools.

Whereas, the City Council of Baltimore City recognizes that a rise in censorship is a threat to intellectual freedom and the foundations of democracy, as it stifles the development of informed and engaged citizens and the unrestrained exchange of ideas.

Whereas, the City Council of Baltimore City condemns book bans as an insidious form of discrimination that target publications about under represented and oppressed persons, and which tend to encourage negative behavior and practices toward them.

Whereas, book bans marginalize these classes of people further, by limiting the public’s education and exposure to them and their struggles, and by making their stories seem taboo or shameful.

Whereas, in the 1982 *Board of Education v. Pico* decision, the United State Supreme Court determined that school book bans motivated by the quashing of unfavored ideas violated the First Amendment, noting, “our Constitution does not permit the official suppression of ideas.” The discretion to regulate educational content “may not be exercised in a narrowly partisan or political manner.”

Now, therefore, be it resolved by the City Council of Baltimore, That the City Council of Baltimore condemns book bans and the attempt to ban books, in the strongest of terms.

And be it further resolved, That the City Council of Baltimore intends to oppose any efforts to ban books in Baltimore City schools and libraries.

And be it further resolved, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the Chief Executive Officer of Baltimore City Public Schools, the President and Chief Executive Officer of Enoch Pratt Free Library, and the Mayor’s Legislative Liaison to the City Council.