



Freedom to Read in Defense of Democracy

A keystone of democracy is free and equitable access to information. Censorship is a direct threat to that access. In response to the recent surge in book challenges and removals in Indiana and throughout the country, the Indiana Library Federation (ILF) reaffirms that the freedom to read and access information is an inalienable right and opposes any effort to ban, remove, or otherwise restrict access to library materials.

Every person, regardless of race, color, religion and creed, gender expression and identity (or the lack thereof), sexual orientation, age, national origin and ancestry, language, disability, education, or socioeconomic status, has the right to read.

They have the right to seek resources and information, and to speak freely, as guaranteed by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and by Article One of the Indiana Constitution. Libraries promote democracy and self-governance by allowing for open exchange in the marketplace of ideas and every individual's right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Libraries also serve a unique and important role to reflect their entire community, while also acting as a window into a wider world. When schools and libraries are faced with the threat of expensive and time-consuming lawsuits, many will decide it is not worth having books that might be challenged. These books often represent the experiences of our most vulnerable community members, including immigrants, refugees, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and other marginalized and underrepresented persons. Libraries are a space where people can safely explore topics some might find uncomfortable, including race and racism, sexuality and gender expression, religion, and politics.

It is the responsibility of qualified, trained library professionals to ensure that 1. Its resources — including collections, displays, and programs — reflect the diverse experiences and broad interests of their communities; and 2. Each person can freely access the resources they want, including materials that others may find offensive or run counter to their personal values. Libraries and school districts have mechanisms in place to guide collection and curriculum decisions and for the public to formally request reconsideration of library materials. These mechanisms promote transparency in government and safeguard the constitutional rights of every American. It is each person's decision, not the decision of the government, what they can check out or access at a library. Parents and guardians have the right to guide their children to materials that are appropriate for their family, but no one has the right to restrict access for others.

ILF is committed to protecting the intellectual freedom of every individual, especially those from historically marginalized communities and displaced people. We call on library and school administrators, boards, and staff; elected officials; and the public to vehemently oppose censorship and reaffirm libraries as strongholds of a free and democratic society.