



October 17, 2023

Dear Honorable Members of the Subcommittee,

We are reaching out to register our alarm over the increase in book bans in public schools and libraries across our country.

The foundation of an open society is the free exchange of ideas. Book bans are unconstitutional and prejudicial, and they have implications that reach far beyond the classroom. They inhibit our children's growth, understanding, and readiness to participate in our democracy.

From restrictions to removals and rating systems, book bans take a variety of forms. Even if a student is theoretically able to obtain a book independently, bans communicate powerful stigmas that lead to fear and self-censorship.

Book ban legislation is often premised on parental rights. Yet these laws fail to respect the rights of parents who want their children to have access to a variety of perspectives. They also fail to account for the rights of other stakeholders: educators, authors, and—most critically—students. Every American student has a constitutional right to access information that is relevant to them.

Age appropriateness—the pretext these discriminatory laws are based on—is a false construct. There is no one-size-fits-all, binary approach to matching books with readers. Students of the same age vary in their capacity for understanding based on cognitive development and life experience. Educators and librarians are trained professionals who curate books based on reading comprehension level, maturity, and their unique understanding of students' needs.

Politically charged, subjective definitions of “appropriateness” tear at the fabric of our democracy. They replace free thinking and independent exploration with orthodoxy. We must trust and empower trained educators and librarians to act in the best interest of students and communities.

At Penguin Random House, our mission is to connect authors with readers. We are proud to publish a vast range of ideas and stories from across the spectrum of identities, as well as scientific, political, and religious perspectives. Every book deserves the opportunity to find its reader. If a state or local government disagrees with an author's message, it can offer its own competing vision. Banning a book is the resort of a government whose message cannot win the hearts and minds of a community. As Supreme Court Justice John Brennan wrote, “The dissemination of ideas can accomplish nothing if otherwise willing addressees are not free to receive and consider them. It would be a barren marketplace of ideas that had only sellers and no buyers.”

We respectfully urge the Subcommittee to consider the long-term consequences of book ban laws on education and within our society, and to prioritize policies that empower educators, respect and enrich students, and uphold the First Amendment and the democratic ideals we cherish as Americans.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We hope for a collaborative approach to ensure every child has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive.

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