



Statement before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce
On: “Protecting Kids: Combating Graphic, Explicit Content in School Libraries.”

The Book Ban Hoax

Parents Just Don’t Want Public Employees to Provide their
Children with Sexually Explicit Material

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Chairman Bean, Ranking Member Bonamici, members of the Committee on Education and the Workforce's subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education, thank you for inviting me to testify.

My name is Max Eden, and I am a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

For years, now, American parents have been slandered by leftwing advocacy organizations and the media as "book banners."

My testimony today is simple: Books aren't being banned. But many parents prefer that school libraries not carry pornographic materials, and some school boards agree that this is reasonable.

Citizens who hear the word "book ban" can be forgiven for being alarmed. Their alarm, however, is not rooted in reality, but rather in the abuse of the English language.

The media keeps using the word "banned." But that word doesn't mean what you think it means. In common usage, "banned" means "made unavailable." Of course, the "most-banned" book *Gender Queer* is still available on Amazon.

The conversation, rather, centers on school libraries. If "ban" means "made unavailable," then virtually every book ever published has been banned. But that's not even what the word means here. A book can be both "banned" and freely available for students.

The media has run with the twisted definition of "ban" proffered by PEN America. According to PEN, if a book has been taken off the shelves, reviewed, and then put back on the shelves it has been "banned." If a school adds a parental permission requirement to a book it has been "banned." If a book is moved to the guidance counselor's office, it has been "banned."

It's a good thing that Orwell is still on offer. To provide an account that isn't utterly linguistically dishonest, the Heritage Foundation's Jay Greene, Madison Marino, and I set out to assess how many of the 2,532 books that PEN's 2022

report labeled as banned were actually removed from school libraries.¹ We did this with one simple trick: we checked the card catalogues. As it turns out, nearly three quarters of books that PEN labeled as “banned” were still in school libraries.

You may have heard that books are being banned because of race or LGBT issues. But that’s not really true. PEN America labeled the Black Lives Matter inspired *The Hate U Give* as the fifth most banned book. But we found it available in every school library in question. And when the *Washington Post* examined over a thousand review requests made by parents, less than 7 percent mentioned LGBT without also containing the word “sexual.”² (Although those requests may have contained words like pornographic or obscene.)

That’s what this issue is really about: the provision of sexually explicit material to children by public employees. This is a question of adult judgement. *Hustler* has closeup genital photos; most believe this is not appropriate for school libraries. *Romeo and Juliet* has lyrical allusions to sex; most believe this is fine for school libraries. A line must be drawn somewhere between those two points. But where exactly?

Take the previously mentioned *Gender Queer*. That graphic novel famously includes a picture of oral sex being performed on a wearable sex toy. Is this okay for kids?

I’ve lost count of the number of times that parents have tried to read these passages at school board meetings, only to be cut off because the school board members insist that it’s too obscene to be read out loud – because, you know, kids could be listening.

If you examine the top 10 most actually removed books, here’s what you find. *Gender Queer* – orally inserting a wearable sex toy. *This Book is Gay* – a how to guide to meeting strangers on sex apps. *Out of Darkness* – rape. *l8r g8r* – a discussion of the finer points of oral sex. *All Boys Aren’t Blue* – underage incest. *It’s Perfectly Normal* – drawings of kids masturbating. *Lawn Boy* – 10-year-olds performing sodomy on each other. *Jack of Hearts* – disposing of a condom soiled

¹ Jay Greene, Max Eden, and Madison Marino. “The Book Ban Mirage,” Education Freedom Institute, July 20, 2023, <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-book-ban-mirage/>.

² Hannah Natanson, “Objection to Sexual, LGBTQ Content Propels Spike in Book Challenges,” *The Washington Post*, May 23, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/05/23/lgbtq-book-ban-challengers/>.

from anal sex. *Crank* – a meth-fueled rape. *Lucky* – rape, meth-free. And *A Court of Mist and Fury* – comparatively tame sexual intercourse.

The Biden Education Department's Office for Civil Rights is investigating and threatening to withdraw federal funding from school districts that even think about removing these books.

For example, the Forsyth County School District in Georgia re-evaluated *Me, Earl and the Dying Girl*. Why?

In one passage, which I maybe shouldn't read verbatim, one character asks another if he knows how to perform oral sex on a woman. The other character replies no, but that he has been taught by "Papa Gaines" how to perform oral sex on an anus.

If you're a school board member that thinks that maybe school libraries don't need reference to performing oral sex on anuses, then be prepared for the Biden administration to come down hard on your district. And if you're a mom who thinks that performing oral sex on anuses is inappropriate material for school libraries, then be prepared for some leftwing organization like PEN America to suggest that you are kind of akin to a Nazi.

Why is it, exactly, that leftwing non-profits, the media, and the Biden administration are so keen to enforce stocking school libraries with pornographic material? They each have their reasons, I'm sure.

But one thing is certain: it's perfectly natural, normal, and responsible for parents to prefer that school districts not stock their libraries with pornographic material. And it's good for school board members to meet the moral preferences of parents.