

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

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**MEMORANDUM**

**April 4, 2022**

**To: Members of the Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties**

**Fr: Committee Staff**

**Re: Hearing on “Free Speech Under Attack: Book Bans and Academic Censorship”**

**On Thursday, April 7, 2022, at 10:00 a.m. ET in room 2154 of the Rayburn House Office Building and remotely on the Zoom video platform**, the Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties will host a hybrid hearing titled “Free Speech Under Attack: Book Bans and Academic Censorship.”

**I. PURPOSE OF THE HEARING**

The Supreme Court has been clear that the “Constitution protects the right to receive information and ideas” and that the First Amendment plays a key role in “affording the public access to discussion, debate, and the dissemination of information and ideas.”<sup>1</sup> That freedom of inquiry extends to school libraries, and the removal of books from these libraries “directly and sharply” implicates students’ First Amendment rights.<sup>2</sup> In school libraries, “the regime of voluntary inquiry holds sway.”<sup>3</sup>

In 2021, the American Library Association’s (ALA) Office for Intellectual Freedom tracked 729 challenges to library, school, and university materials, resulting in more than 1,579 individual book challenges or removals.<sup>4</sup> These 729 challenges represent the highest number of attempted book bans in the 20 years that the ALA has tracked this data. The majority of books targeted were either authored by, or were about, Black or LGBTQ+ people. This hearing will focus on the effects these challenges and bans have on students, parents, teachers, librarians, and communities.

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<sup>1</sup> *Island Trees School Dist. v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853 (1982) (citing *Stanley v. Georgia*, 394 U.S. 557 (1969); *Kliendienst v. Mandel*, 408 U.S. 753 (1972); *First National Bank of Boston v. Belotti*, 435 U.S. 765 (1978)).

<sup>2</sup> *Island Trees School Dist. v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853 (1982).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> American Library Association, *The State of America’s Libraries Report 2022* (2022) (online at [www.ala.org/news/state-americas-libraries-report-2022](http://www.ala.org/news/state-americas-libraries-report-2022)).

## II. WITNESSES

### Panel I

**Christina Ellis**

Student

York County, Pennsylvania

**Shreya Mehta**

Student

Richland, Washington

**Olivia Pituch**

Student

York County, Pennsylvania

### Panel II

**Ruby Bridges**

Author

**Samantha Hull**

Librarian

Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

**Jessica Berg**

Teacher

Loudoun County, Virginia

**Mindy Freeman**

Parent

Bucks County, Pennsylvania