

Dear Rep. Raskin:

Thank you for convening the Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties' hearing on the attempts to ban books in school and public libraries. I applaud your inclusion of students and librarians among the witnesses; both groups have been targeted and harmed by these attacks.

As you are aware, the political actors engaging in "protest performances" at board of education meetings operate from a script to attack lists of books compiled by groups such as Moms for Liberty and No Left Turn. These groups object to content related to LGBTQ+ youth and people of color. Their attacks on books, however, are really a proxy war on LGBTQ+ and BIPOC people themselves. Watching adults in the community spew hatred at school board meetings has given bullies in our schools new license to utter slurs against LGBTQ+ and BIPOC students.

Rather than books, this movement is about fear, change, and control of the social, cultural, and political climate. The challenged books are a symbol of the rising visibility of once-marginalized segments of our society. And attacking school libraries is an attempt to undermine confidence in public education, which is part of the agenda, too. It's all leading up to the midterm election cycle and beyond, where power becomes the true prize.

In some cases, these groups target not just books, but also the professional librarians who build diverse collections to serve their communities. On Sept. 28, 2021, I was labeled by name as a pornographer, pedophile and groomer of children during a book protest at a meeting of the North Hunterdon-Voorhees (NJ) Board of Education. Those false accusations resulted in hate mail, trolling on social media, shunning by colleagues, vandalism in the library, and damage to my physical and mental health. You can learn more about my experience in [School Library Journal](#) and [Mindsite News](#). No educator should be subjected to such treatment.

The parents who defamed me also attempted to ban five books in our district: *All Boys Aren't Blue*, *Fun Home*, *Gender Queer*, *Lawn Boy*, and *This Book is Gay*. Students responded by attending board meetings month after month to speak about the importance of seeing themselves represented in the books they read. The board of education listened, voting in January to retain all five titles and uphold intellectual freedom.

In the midst of the turmoil in our district one student -- a young woman who is a member of both the LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities -- expressed to me her anger and sadness about the attacks on the library and students' rights. She said, "I want to go to a board meeting and tell those people how I feel, but their voices are so much louder than mine."

Don't let that be so. Please urge subcommittee members to listen closely to the students and librarians who testify on Thursday. Amplify their voices to broadcast a

message to the nation, a message once delivered by Rep. Clare Booth Luce:
"Censorship, like charity, should begin at home; but unlike charity, it should end there."
That would be a perfect way to honor April's National Library Month.

With deep appreciation and admiration for your service,

Martha Hickson, MLIS
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