

MassSenate

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Senate Passes Bill Guarding Against Politically Motivated Book Bans

Bill guards against political bias in library decisions, protects librarians from reprisals

(BOSTON—11/13/2025) The Massachusetts Senate today took action to protect freedom of thought in Massachusetts schools and public libraries and safeguard open access to books and other educational materials as part of its Response 2025 initiative to respond to federal threats.

As school libraries are increasingly faced with politically-charged debates over banning access to particular library books, the bill—*An Act regarding free expression*, [S.2696](#)—creates clear guidelines for how schools and libraries decide which books to make available, and how local leaders determine whether a book is appropriate or should be removed from the shelf.

The legislation requires that school library materials be age-appropriate, serve an educational purpose, and be chosen based on a teacher or employee’s professional training—leaving aside personal, political, or doctrinal views which could affect their decision to place the book on the shelf.

“I’m proud to stand with my Senate colleagues today in support of this bipartisan bill to protect values we hold so dear: the freedom to create, to think for one’s self, to explore ourselves and our world through books and art, and pass the legacy of free expression to our children and grandchildren,” said **Senate President Karen E. Spilka (D-Ashland)**. “This bill is just one of many that the Senate is prioritizing and passing this session as part of our Response 2025 initiative to protect our residents, defend our values and lead Massachusetts during these dark days when our basic civil and constitutional rights are under constant attack. I’d like to thank Senator Cyr for his impassioned leadership on this issue, Senate Ways and Means Chair Rodrigues for his careful work on this bill, Senator Oliveira for his incredible advocacy, Senator Mark for prioritizing getting this bill to the floor quickly, and all of my Senate colleagues for recognizing just how important free expression is to our democracy, our Commonwealth, and our children. Finally, I’d like to thank librarians throughout Massachusetts for the incredible service they provide every single day.”

“By requiring our schools and libraries to develop comprehensive review policies, this legislation combats censorship efforts, safeguards librarians, ensures due process for books under scrutiny, and protects the integrity of reading materials for children and adults across the Commonwealth,” said **Senator Michael J. Rodrigues (D-Westport), Chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means**. “As someone who loves to read and firmly believes in the right to free expression, I am grateful that the Senate has passed this meaningful bill, demonstrating our commitment to protecting literature in our schools and libraries.”

“I am thrilled that the Senate has taken decisive bipartisan action to push back against cowardly attempts to ban books in our schools and public libraries. Massachusetts is not immune from the un-American panic gripping the nation in recent years. Today, the Senate defends the right to read and ensures that decisions about library materials are made by trained professionals, not political actors. This bill is about protecting the people who make our libraries and schools places of discovery, inclusion and belonging,” said **Senator Julian Cyr (D-Truro)**, the lead sponsor of the bill. “I’m profoundly grateful to Senate President Karen Spilka for her trust and guidance in advancing this legislation, to Senator Jake Oliveira, my steadfast partner and co-sponsor in this effort, my colleagues and the scores of librarians and authors who made this bill possible. Today’s vote is a powerful statement: in the Commonwealth, we don’t ban books—we champion them.”

Local school districts and municipal public libraries would have the flexibility to craft their own policies that align with state protocols and the standards of the American Library Association. For school libraries, an appropriate process for considering whether to remove a book would include assurance that a challenged book remains available to library patrons while the process plays out, guarding against frivolous or unfounded complaints.

The bill would protect librarians and school employees from retaliation over their selection of library books, ensuring that they do not suffer professional, civil, or criminal penalties if they have acted in good faith and followed their library materials policy. To help the state track challenges to books in libraries around the state, the bill also calls for data on such proceedings to be compiled annually and filed with the Legislature.

“Libraries are an invaluable space for learning, education, and in rural parts of the state, also a crucial hub for our communities,” said **Senator Paul W. Mark (D-Becket), Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts and Cultural Development**. “Protecting the integrity of free speech and expression is so important in a democracy, and in recognition of that, I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to work with my colleagues and stakeholders from all over Massachusetts to quickly move this bill favorably from committee and onto the Senate floor today.”

“Free expression is at the heart of a healthy democracy. Everyone deserves the opportunity to see themselves reflected in the stories and ideas available in our public and school libraries,” said **Senator Jacob R. Oliveira (D-Ludlow)**. “This bill ensures that the materials on our shelves are chosen by trained library professionals, not for political or personal reasons. When we trust our librarians to do their jobs, we ensure that every voice, every story, and every reader has a place in our Commonwealth.”

During the course of today’s debate, Senators voted on a 37-0 roll call to add language to the bill ([Amendment 4](#)) strengthening the voice of authors to make their work available to the public. As amended, the bill now gives book authors and creators the right to challenge their book’s removal from a school library in court.

The legislation was advanced by a [17-0](#) vote of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means on November 6, 2025, following a [6-0](#) vote and favorable report from the Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts and Cultural Development on August 14, 2025.

The Senate voted [35-3](#) to approve the bill and send it to the House of Representatives for further consideration.

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Statements of Support

Geraldine Brooks, Winner of the 2025 Library of Congress Fiction Prize; 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction

“In the land of the free and the home of the brave, any attempt to censor books is both cowardly and un-American. Fear of words and fear of ideas springs from a bereft ideology of division and hate. Librarians have shown extraordinary courage as the frontline defenders of our freedom. This vital legislation has their back.”

Celeste Ng, Amazon Book of the Year Winner; 2020 Guggenheim Fellow

“From the days of the American Revolution, Massachusetts has been known for its courage in the face of tyranny and for its fierce defense of liberty. It feels especially important that Massachusetts take a stand now to defend freedom of expression and the freedom to read what one chooses—particularly in the face of a federal government actively working to erase the stories and histories that truly make America great.”

David Leonard, President, Boston Public Library

“Ever since it was chartered in 1848, the Boston Public Library has stood for free access to reading, information, and learning for all. In fact, the directive that “The Commonwealth requires the education of the people as the safeguard of order and liberty” is etched in stone on the façade of the historic McKim building. This act that the Seante has passed today protects and preserves the freedom of patrons to read and to access information; and upholds the trust that our patrons have in our institutions across the commonwealth. Critically, it also ensures that library workers can carry out their duties without fear of repercussion, as they build collections that are unique to their communities and patrons.”

Suzanne Brockman, author of Over the Edge

“I’m of the opinion that no books should ever be banned. Different ideas and points of view were vital to my own education. As a very young reader, I read way above my grade level, and would’ve been bored silly without that opportunity. Books

were a window for me—to a very diverse, colorful, delightful, wide-and-welcoming world. And I truly wish that the books I read had provided me with more of a reflection—as a young girl in the 1960s and early 1970s, I didn’t see much of myself in the adventure stories I loved. Providing a reflection is vitally important for our children—to see stories about people who look like them, who feel the things they feel—to show them that they are not alone in this wide and beautifully diverse world. To take that away, especially from our LGBTQ+ kids and kids of color, is a tragedy.”

M.T. Andersen, author of Feed

“As Thomas Jefferson frequently argued, an educated and informed electorate is absolutely necessary for a democratic republic. Without citizens who understand the world, a democracy will fail. It will stumble into blind autocracy and dictatorship. Access to books and libraries are central to the American project, our shared future. So that kid reading books forty years ago in that little turreted, brick library in Stow urges the Massachusetts legislature to protect our librarians—to pass the Act Regarding Free Expression—to stand up for knowledge, for freedom, and for truth. This is what America is supposed to be about.”

Lesléa Newman, author of Heather Has Two Mommies; Sparkle Boy; The Boy Who Cried Fabulous; October Mourning: A Song for Matthew Shepard and 83 additional titles for readers of all ages

“All children and young adults benefit from seeing themselves represented in literature, as it conveys the message, ‘you belong.’ And all children and young adults benefit from seeing a diverse group of people represented in literature, as it conveys the message ‘we all belong.’ To ensure that we are all represented, books need to be chosen by trained, professional librarians and teachers who have spent their careers studying literature and education and can judge a book fairly, instead of bowing down to special interest groups with political agendas. Freedom of expression is vital to opening hearts and minds and needs to be protected. I urge you to do all you can to protect intellectual freedom. Our young people are depending on us.”

Rajani LaRocca, Massachusetts Book Award and Newbery Honor-winning author of Red, White, and Whole

“Stories express what it is to be human. Books reflect the diversity of humanity, foster empathy, and help us form ties to each other. They help understand our world and inspire us to improve it. Freedom of thought and expression are central to our democracy. Thank you to the Massachusetts Senate for helping to safeguard these vital freedoms and to support librarians, teachers, authors, and readers in these trying times.”