

Responding to Historic Book Censorship Crisis, American Booksellers Association Publishes The ABA Right to Read Handbook

ABA released a needed book on the book ban crisis, featuring organizing resources for readers, essays & interviews, in time for Banned Books Week Sept. 22–28.

HARRISON, NY, UNITED STATES, August 22, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Book censorship in the United States has reached an all-time high. 4,240 book titles have been challenged since 2021, up 65% in 2023 vs. 2022.¹ Many of these challenges focus on public schools, but they also target public libraries, with public library challenges up 92% in 2023 vs. the previous year² and laws going into effect putting burdensome restrictions on libraries.³

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Philomena Polefrone, PhD

Although the American Booksellers Association and its allies are challenging unconstitutional book ban laws in Texas,⁴ Arkansas,⁵ and elsewhere, for most people the only way to help stop it is through local and state-level organizing targeting school boards and state legislatures. But the scale and complexity of the problem daunt many would-be organizers.

The ABA Right to Read Handbook: Fighting Book Bans and Why It Matters is a practical guide for resisting book censorship, aimed at the average reader who might only have a few hours each month to spare. The Handbook features an accessible history of book censorship, a deep dive into the current book ban crisis, how-tos for organizing your community, and over a dozen interviews and profiles featuring authors, booksellers, activists, and parents. It was written by Philomena Polefrone, PhD, of [American Booksellers for Free Expression \(ABFE\)](#), ABA's freedom of expression initiative.

1 “Book Ban Data.” American Library Association. Accessed August 21, 2024. <https://www.ala.org/bbooks/book-ban-data>.

2 Ibid.

3 Greene, Peter. “Idaho Created a Book Ban Bounty. Now a Library Is Adults Only.” Forbes, June 4,

2024.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/petergreene/2024/05/23/ida-ho-created-a-book-ban-bounty-now-a-library-is-a-dults-only/>.

4 "ABA Files Suit Challenging Texas Censorship Law." the American Booksellers Association, July 26, 2023.

<https://www.bookweb.org/news/aba-files-suit-challenging-texas-censorship-law-1629754>.

5 "ABA and Partners File Lawsuit to Protect the Right to Read." the American Booksellers Association, May 31, 2023.

<https://www.bookweb.org/news/aba-and-partners-file-lawsuit-protect-right-read-1629586>.

"The book ban crisis has been out of control since 2021 and gets worse every year," says Polefrone. "Book challenges are inspired by disinformation targeting authors, booksellers, librarians, and educators, and they're happening in every state in America. I was looking for a practical guide that had everything a would-be activist needs to start resisting book censorship, but I couldn't find one. I realized we'd need to create it."

Polefrone will speak about the Handbook and book bans at Politics & Prose in Washington, DC, on September 15, 3pm; Books Are Magic at the Brooklyn Public Library (Brooklyn Heights), Brooklyn, NY, on September 26, 6pm; in Portland at Powell's City of Books at Burnside, September 28, 3pm; and at Lion's Tooth in Milwaukee, WI, on October 10th, at 5:30.

ABA's CEO Allison Hill says of the Handbook, "It is inconceivable that in the United States of America citizens need to know how to defend their right to read. But the future of literacy, access to books, the inclusion of diverse voices, and democracy in this country depends on it. ABA is proud to share these resources and hopeful that they empower readers to take action during this critical crisis."

Contributors include: New York times bestselling authors Lauren Groff (The Vaster Wilds) and Malinda Lo (Last Night at the Telegraph Club); booksellers from Books & Books (Coral Gables, FL), Bookshop at The Bottom (Knoxville, TN), and Rediscovered Books (Boise, Idaho); activists from Authors Against Book Bans, Red Wine & Blue, and the Texas Freedom to Read Project; and more.

Director Paige Allen, of IngramSpark, the Handbook's publisher, says, "As the Director of IngramSpark, I am thrilled to support The ABA Right to Read Handbook: A Reader's Guide to Fighting Book Bans. This powerful resource is more than just a guide; it's a beacon of hope and a



call to action. In an era where the freedom to read is increasingly under threat, this handbook provides the tools, strategies, and inspiration needed to combat censorship and protect intellectual freedom. By standing together and advocating for our right to access diverse voices and stories, we can ensure that literature remains a limitless source of knowledge, empathy, and growth. Let this handbook inspire and equip you to join the fight for the right to read, empowering current and future generations to explore the vast world of ideas without restriction.”

Philomena Polefrone is ABA's Advocacy Associate Manager and point person for American Booksellers for Free Expression (ABFE). A former bookseller, she was also a Lecturer at Columbia University, where she taught courses in writing, literature and activism, and political philosophy. Since joining ABA last year, she has participated in strategic planning for ABA's lawsuits against unconstitutional book ban laws; created education and resources for bookstores; and supported bookstores where freedom of expression were jeopardized.

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