

Ban the Bans

Posted on Nov 01, Posted by [Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31](#) Category [Wisconsin](#)



Sen. Smith discusses the dangers of censorship and the vital importance of libraries to the cause of intellectual freedom.

MADISON - “To Kill A Mockingbird” by Harper Lee. “The Handmaid’s Tale” by Margaret Atwood. “Fahrenheit 451” by Ray Bradbury. All titles you may remember from a high school literature syllabus. Yet each of these books have been banned – and in some cases, burned – in the United States.

In October we commemorated Banned Books Week, amidst an increase in attempts at banning books across the nation. In places like Menomonee Falls, certain books have been challenged as being inappropriate and therefore unworthy of inclusion in the library’s catalog. This year, the American Library Association (ALA) has recorded 26 attempts to ban books in Wisconsin and attempts to censor more than 1,900 titles nationwide. This is the highest number of books since they first started collecting data twenty years ago.

This coincides with state legislatures attempting to restrict access to materials across the country. Right here in Wisconsin, a bill was recently circulated for co-sponsorship to require

school libraries and public libraries disclose to parents and guardians within 24 hours a list of the materials their child has checked out from the library.



As it stands, if a parent or guardian is concerned about the material their child is accessing through the library, they can request that information. These are reasonable accommodations so parents can provide guidance if they believe their child needs additional context for the content they are reading or consuming.

But automatic notifications disclosing what books your kid is checking out is not the way. On a very practical level, it would be hard for libraries to develop such systems without funding. Libraries are expected to develop these programs using the financial and personnel resources they already have.

The larger concern is the role of privacy in freedom of speech. Privacy has long been a concern of the American Library Association, and has historically included the privacy of youth. Privacy is included in the “Library Bill of Rights,” drafted in 1939. Article VII states, “All people, regardless of origin, age, background, or views, possess a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use.” In their publication “Privacy: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights”, the ALA clarifies, “The right to privacy includes the right to open inquiry without having the subject of one’s interest examined or scrutinized by others ALA and its members recognize that children and youth have the same right to privacy as adults.”



[Subscribe](#)