



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL

Legislation Text

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PROPOSED RESOLUTION

A RESOLUTION AGAINST BOOK BANS

WHEREAS, as John Milton laid out in his 1644 treatise, *Areopagitica*, “he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself”; and

WHEREAS, according to PEN America, from July 2022 through June 2023 there were over 3,400 instances of individual books banned, representing a 33 percent increase in bans compared to the prior year; and

WHEREAS, according to PEN American, of 1,648 unique book titles banned throughout the 2021-22 school year, 41 percent explicitly addressed LGBTQ+ themes or have protagonists or prominent secondary characters who are LGBTQ+, 40 percent contained protagonists or prominent secondary characters of color, and 21 percent directly addressed issues of race and racism; and

WHEREAS, of the overall 2,532 bans in the 2021-2022 school year, 96 percent of them were enacted without following the best practice guidelines for book challenges outlined by the American Library Association, the National Coalition Against Censorship, and the National Council of Teachers of English; and

WHEREAS, according to the Every Library Institute, over 75 percent of Americans oppose book banning, and more than 50 percent of voters are concerned about legislation being created to regulate Americans’ access to books; and

WHEREAS, according to the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) and Brookings Institution, nearly nine of 10 Americans oppose banning books that include depictions of slavery from being taught in public schools; and

WHEREAS, PRRI also reports over 80 percent of Americans oppose banning public high school courses like AP African American History because the topics of slavery and segregation are likely to make white students feel guilty or uncomfortable; and

WHEREAS, in 1969, the Supreme Court of the United States held in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969), that students do not “shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate”; and

WHEREAS, in 1982, a plurality of the Supreme Court of the United States wrote in *Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District No. 26 v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853 (1982), that schools may not remove library books based on “narrowly partisan or political grounds”, as this kind of censorship will result in “official suppression of ideas”; and

WHEREAS, reading is a foundational skill, absolutely vital to learning and understanding the various and nuanced perspectives across our communities; and

WHEREAS, limiting people’s access to books does not protect them from our world's ever changing, complex, and challenging issues; and

WHEREAS, it is crucial that we protect access to books that offer teachable moments for readers of all ages and expand our understanding of people with different backgrounds, ideas, and beliefs; and

WHEREAS, the State of Illinois committed to that protection by passing HB2789, that adopts the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights that indicates “materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval,” as well as adopts the policy that the State of Illinois is to “encourage and protect the freedom of libraries and library systems to acquire materials without external limitation and to be protected against attempts to ban, remove, or otherwise restrict access to books or other materials,”

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the President and the Cook County Board of Commissioners hereby joins the State of Illinois in reaffirming its commitment to supporting the freedom of expression as protected under the First Amendment and the freedom of all individuals in the United States to read books without government censorship; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that suitable copies of this resolution be presented to the Governor of Illinois, the Illinois Senate President and Minority Leader, the Illinois House Speaker and Minority Leader, Senator Laura Murphy, and Representative Anne Stava-Murray.