

Education Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-7014

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING PUBLIC SCHOOL LIBRARIES.

Vote Date: 3/21/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/26/2025

File No.: 595

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill aims to require school boards to establish a formal policy by January 1, 2026, for evaluating school library materials that receive complaints from students or their parents/guardians. The policy must include a complaint form, a clear submission process, and a review committee made up of designated school officials. It ensures that materials are only removed or restricted following a thorough review by this committee and based on the adopted policy. The bill also mandates that school boards provide reasons for any removal or restriction but prohibits actions based on partisan content, the identity of authors or characters, or personal moral, political, or religious views. It's crucial because it safeguards intellectual freedom, ensuring that decisions about educational materials are made fairly and transparently, and that students have access to a diverse range of ideas without undue censorship based on personal biases. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of age-appropriate content while maintaining protections against arbitrary removal.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Expressed

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Leslie Blatteau, President, New Haven Federation of Teachers: As a teacher, parent, and resident of New Haven I feel qualified to testify on HB 7014. Opponents cite their first Amendment rights, but this bill protects students' freedom to read. Our Librarians and Library Media Specialist curate responsive, inspiring, and appropriate libraries for our students. Attempts to ban books limits student access to the text and sources that help them understand

the world. Restrictions take away opportunities for critical thinking skills, empathy, and cultural awareness. This bill provides a clear path to support our libraries and students.

Colleen Bailie, Director, West Haven Library: As a librarian for almost 17 years and 9 years as Director, libraries are a happy safe place for a child to discover the love of reading. There were times when teachers question their reading lists and having procedures in place to make the process easier for teachers should go for librarians. Our book collection is large and curated based on our patrons' tastes. Every library is unique in what they offer based on our individual towns and cities. There are those in our society that feel if they don't like something then no one should have access. Libraries are institutions that cater to all and while there are things that may not be my cup of tea it may be the favorite of someone else. Every child deserves to have the ability to see themselves reflected on the shelves of their school libraries.

Katie Byroade, Director, Cragin Memorial Library: Across the country books on library shelves are being called pornography. Public and school libraries do not have pornography. Many books have been removed and legal challenges have reached the Federal courts and the removals have been reversed. These legal cases are costing local governments and school districts thousands of dollars. A clearly defined written policy with defined procedures is needed to ensure the freedom to read. Ignoring established law can expose a school district or municipality to civil lawsuits. With a clear policy in place a community can be ensured that it does not violate the First Amendment rights.

Joslyn DeLancey, Vice President, Connecticut Education Association: This bill ensures that public school libraries continue to protect student' freedom to read. The bill upholds transparency and accountability at the local level while providing students with diverse and well-rounded educational resources. Librarians and media library specialist are professionals who curate collections aligned with students' interests, developmental needs, and educational goals. Uphold the integrity of our public-school libraries and protect students' freedom to read by passing this bill.

Kayla Iannette, Teacher, LGBTQ+ Advocate: As an advocate for two Connecticut based nonprofits and a member of the LGBTQ+ community I have seen the formal book complaints against LGBTQ+ books in our school library. I was there when the wave of formal complaints was presented by a person who had all the talking points being used across the country and the misinformation. As other districts removed books from the library shelves without any investigation my district was prepared. This bill helps those without any direction to have a uniform policy and will protect access to books in all libraries in our state.

Manuel Iglesias Fernandez, Teen & YA Services Librarian, Hartford Public Library: The bill establishes a transparent policy for evaluating public school library materials giving our young learners access to information while safeguarding intellectual freedom. Literature provided me the understanding I needed to navigate my own identity. School libraries are where many students encounter stories that reflect their experiences. Removing books based on discomfort denies young people the opportunity to explore who they are in a safe space. A clear consistent process will ensure that library policies are applied fairly and equitably.

Sam Lee, Co-Chair, Intellectual Freedom Committee of the Connecticut Library

Association: Public libraries have seen an increase of censorship particularly concerning the argument involving parental rights. Librarians have always helped parents exercise their rights and responsibilities, but these rights are not without parental responsibilities. Book challenges do not support parental rights if they dictate what someone else's child may read. Professional practices dictate that libraries should have procedures and policies covering selection, maintenance, library collection development and consideration of materials. These policies protect the first amendment right of community free speech. Libraries lacking policies can be bullied into censorship and limiting accesses to materials other do not agree with. Libraries best serve our democratic values by having collections that serve the wide-range needs and interests of everyone.

Peter Sulkis, Executive Vice President, West Haven Federation of Teachers: This is not a new issue however in the current alternative facts age the truth is not absolute and personal opinions often outweighs the collective voice. The books that are being removed are depriving students of learning about different perspectives, cultures and life experiences. Most of our authors such as Toni Morrison, Judy Blume, Maurice Sendak, and Madeleine L 'Engle have endures because their books reflect the feelings and emotions of being human. As a young student the library represented a doorway to the world thru the written word. This bill offers Connecticut school districts commonsense procedures and protocols for materials that are being challenged. This bill does not have a large price tag but supports library media specialists in their quest to connect students to the complex works without fear of recriminations.

Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Council, American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut: We are dedicated to protecting young people's constitutional censorship in all forms. A national survey revealed that 80 percent or more of parents believe it is important that their children accept people who are different from them. Libraries play a vital role in fostering understanding by providing access to materials that offer a variety of human experiences. The First Amendment guarantees the right to share and receive information and ideas. This is true in libraries where people freely explore different ideas, topics, viewpoints and lived experiences. This bill protects the intellectual health of society and provides a well-functioning democracy with free and unfettered access to knowledge.

Elliot Morelli-Wolfe, Library Assistant, Douglas Library of Hebron: The bill protects information freedom and creates policies that allow for parental involvement while still protecting student's rights to access information. Libraries need to provide materials that cover all perspectives for walks of life. To restrict information handicaps our children's growth and development. I agree that parents have a right to have a say in what their children lean and are exposed to, but it is unfair for one parent to make decisions for all the children in school. I work primarily with the teen population at the library ad today's generation is being exposed to an overload of information that parents may find questionable. Between friends, the internet, the news our students are exposed to many things that we cannot control. We need polices in every library to protect the free access to critical information. Protect our libraries and the critical services they provide.

Marney White, Professor, Yale School of Public Health: It is critically important that school boards enact policies to prevent opposition to books. In Fairfield there was an attempt to remove books from the public library. These were books that a small minority deemed to be inappropriate for youth audience. The effort fortunately was ineffective. Libraries and boards

of education need to be equipped with clear policies to prevent this targeted attack. Teens and children need access to sexual education materials to improve esteem and mental health. A robust education includes the ability access resources in libraries.

S J Taylor, mother and author: As a mother of a second-grade student and preschooler I have published stories in the BEING ACE anthology. A collection for teens written by asexual authors featuring asexual characters. At an author table at the Granby Children's Book Fair, I was verbally harassed by a man who insisted that the BEING ACE anthology had no place at this fair. The man was trying to get such books (by queer authors, featuring queer characters) removed from school libraries. He called them smut and insisted they were against his religion and declared that my asexual orientation was a choice. There was a young girl who heard the conversation and told her librarian that "I am not a smut." At the public hearing I witnessed blanket statements about books that should and shouldn't be allowed. The books referred to were short excerpts taken out of context. I caution anyone from making blanket judgments and taking excerpts out of context. School librarians as well as children's authors care about young readers and ensure that kids and teens feel seen and heard.

Alexandre Sise: Libraries are created, curated, and staffed by educated professionals and the public's whims or partisan objections should not be a factor in the process. We don't need to go by who is the loudest but who has taken the time to study and review what goes in a library as well as the purpose of a library. One of my favorite nights with my then 6-year-old child was when we attended author Chad Sell's visit to have our children learn about his books that included two moms and a child. The oppression of books and free speech is dangerous, and our leaders need to stand up for what is right and just.

Karen Pfeffer, Library Media Specialist, Gilbert School: The library was my happy space where I was allowed to see the world thru various lenses. As an advocate for intellectual freedom, the cornerstone of education, the issue at hand is not about individual titles. It is about fundamental right of students to access a range of ideas, perspectives, and stories. I urge the establishment of clear, transparent, and fair process for book challenges- one that respects viewpoints whole ensuring one individual does not dictate what other can or cannot read. Removing books based on a single individual undermines the core principle of education. Parents have the right to guide their own children's reading choices and have every right to set boundaries as to what their child reads in their own family. They do not have the right to make that for every child in the school. Trained library media specialist can work collaboratively with Board of Education and school administrations to help shape policies that will serve the entire school community. Allow us to do our job and support our student's freedom.

Tony Perugini, Secretary, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education: CABA supports the bill as it reflects our model for policy for districts which encourages districts to create a process for review of materials and defines a qualified complaint.

Courtney Radosavljevic: Parents should keep out of our public and school libraries. Our librarians are trained professionals who spend their time and money on degrees in library and information science. Let them just do their job. If individuals feel threatened by a book, then don't read it. I am in favor of protecting our librarians from harassment. We need to show people who threaten and bully that we will not allow it.

Sofia Pendley, PhD, Fairfield: Book challenges have risen dramatically in the last 18 months as reported by the American Library Association. Connecticut librarians are professionals who match students with age-appropriate materials and if a book is challenged then there should be a formal review process. Access to materials in public libraries enrich students' education and allow them to explore information that we may not be able to provide in the home.

Richard Novack, Jr, Orange: As the father of two and an educator I have seen members of the community disregard and disrespect the rights of students to have access to information, books and media. My children and my students must be allowed to find their voice and deserve access to books that affirm their beliefs and challenge their assumptions. Our democracy is in a crisis of truth. Misleading information abounds while truth is hindered. We need laws so that public libraries can be led by professionals who adhere to rigorous standards, ethical practices, and binding laws.

Michelle Noehren: The bill is crucial in protecting intellectual freedom and ensuring our school libraries remain centers of learning by requiring local boards of education a process of complaints in our libraries. School librarians put their collections based on professional expertise and banning books thru politically motivated efforts should stop. Librarians should be entrusted with the responsibility of choosing the books in our school libraries without politically motivated censorship.

Amanda Morgan, Director, Westport Writers' Workshop: As a former high school English teacher and current Fairfield University professor I quote Susan Orleans's Book, The Library Book, "The library is a prerequisite to let citizens make use of their right to information and freedom of speech. Free access to information is necessary in a democratic society, for open debate and creation of public opinion." In this era of increased politicization school districts and school boards need specific, written policies on how to handle parent or community concerns about library materials. Censoring books is rooted in fear, and it is essential we do not let this fear limit the world to our children. Connecticut librarians are professionals who match students with age-appropriate materials and if a book is challenged then there should be a formal review process. Access to materials in public libraries enrich students' education and allow them to explore information that we may not be able to provide in the home.

Joslyn DeLancey, Vice President, Connecticut Education Association: CEA supports the bill and its critical step in upholding transparency and accountability at the local lever. The bill establishes a framework for local and regional boards to develop clear policies on library collection development, programming, and the review of materials. We urge the support to uphold the integrity of our public-school libraries and the freedom to read.

Nicole Allen: Book challenges should be open and completely transparent. The objector deserves to know their complaint was received and why a book is removed. Specific procedures means that the book can be evaluated regardless of the school or staff members belief. Books should not be removed because of partisan content, the author's identity, personal discomfort of board members or the content's relation to sexual health unless inappropriate for students based on age and development. Libraries are for all students and when a book that the student identified with is removed, we send a message that there is something wrong with this student.

Kristina Lareau, Head of Children's Services, Ridgefield Library:

As a Children's Librarian for 14 years, I support school districts and public libraries having policies on library collections, displays and programs. Requiring these policies protects and codifies the right to read and the right to partition. Children's and school librarians are professionals with years of knowledge, schooling, and experience of the books and media in our care. We need to ensure that we can provide the right book at the right time and that is different for every child and family. Connecticut has a long history of supporting our education, schools and libraries.

Jenny Lussier, PreK-3 Librarian:

With a master's Degrees and serving 2 elementary schools I see daily what our members see. Diverse collection matters and I have had specific training in collection development. I follow my school's collection development policies and curate a list for my administrator and central office staff. My collections are balanced and believe there are only 4 reasons to remove any book:

1. Condition of the Item
2. Date of Publication
3. Inaccuracies
4. Date of last circulation

If a parent has a concern, there is a reconsideration process that is followed. This bill ensures that students who use Connecticut's school libraries have the ability to learn and the freedom to read what interests them.

Joelle Kilcourse, Stratford:

As an educator and parent, I understand the importance of maintaining a diverse library environment while addressing parental concerns. This bill presents a thoughtful solution to achieving balance and ensures that the interests of all stakeholders are considered and valued.

Jennifer Jacquet:

My adopted son is Asian American with disabilities and two moms. He deserves access to books that show situations and families that represent his life. He enjoys books that include characters with relationship dynamics that aren't addressed and are treated as a normal part of these characters lives. If these books are not available, then you take away our families right to make that decision for our child.

Patricia Alonso:

As a mother of a bi-sexual daughter I know how much comfort she has gained from books with which she identifies. After reading books recommended by her Trusted, knowledgeable librarians she realized she was not abnormal. My daughter is just one of the examples of how important representation is for young minds.

Olivia Blake, Librarian:

The number of attempts to censor and silence diverse voices have skyrocketed. These attempts cite "protecting children" as a primary rational but ignore the actual development of children and young people. Books are tools for understanding complex issues. Limiting their access does not protect them from lives complex and challenging issues. All children deserve and need to see themselves reflected in books. When children see characters who look like them, they learn that their own voices are valued. Books are a haven, and libraries are a haven for providing them. Libraries provide access to worlds of information, support for discovering new ideas and an avenue for readers to find books that resonate with them.

Elaine Gencarelli, School Library Media Specialist:

What is a great education without access to knowledge: As a School Library Media Specialist we play an essential role in our libraries. We are curators of information champions of literacy, and defenders of intellectual freedom. We empower students to become informed citizens. The bill ensures the following:

1. Transparency & Access to Information
2. Accountability in Curriculum & Resources
3. Equity & Student Success
4. Protecting Intellectual Freedom

Stand up and ensure that every student in Connecticut has access to knowledge, guidance, and the resources they need to thrive.

Megan Hatch Geary, 2020 Ct Teacher of the Year:

We as educators have a responsibility to ensure that that library materials are non-discriminatory, accessible and are spaces for free inquiry and free expression. If an individual parent wishes to restrict what their child reads that is their business. It is deeply un-American and Un-democratic to allow one parent to make decisions for the entire populations. Schools and those serving them deserve to be protected and the process for challenging a book should be clear and explicit so it can't be abused.

Timothy Gabriele:

Given the many well-financed efforts to remove books from schools and public libraries it is imperative that the state set guidelines and formalize the processes for when these challenges arise. The stewardship of librarians overseeing large collections is a specialized skill and should not be undermined by ideologues looking to push an agenda. I will close with Read a Book because Censorship never turns out well for the societies that implement it.

Deborah Freedman, member of the Society of Children's Book Authors & Illustrators:

As a member of Authors Against Book Bans, a mother, and a grandmother I support this bill. It is necessary to propose policies on school districts and public library collections and to codify the right to read and the right to petition. I know that the library is not just for myself and my children. No one else has the right to judge and select books for others.

Over 25 also submitted testimony in support if the bill:

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Stephen Mendelson: As someone who had Re-catalogued books and has watched this debate it is not "book banning" or the "freedom to read" but agenda driven by Librarians. Libraries should be a source of diverse viewpoints and books that have been challenged in other states should remain in libraries. Sometimes librarians do not recognize their biases. If we want to keep books like Huckleberry Finn, then we must also include Little House on The Prairie. If the issue is freedom to read, then we cannot engage in The American Library Association's viewpoint censorship. The right is concerned with actual pornography in teen books, but the left seeks to ban ideas that don't fit with theirs. Violent and even genocidal would be protected from challenge under this bill as in sections 1(b)(2) and 1(b)(4) would prohibit challenges based on an author's political or religious views with no mention of age-

appropriateness. The bill fails in multiple ways and allows agenda-driven librarians power to determine that explicit pornographic and genocidal hate books be accessible to young children.

Lisa Amatruda, Woodbury: I am not advocating for banning books and I believe in and support our constitution including the First Amendment, but I am for AGE-appropriate books in our school libraries. Hartford legislators should not make laws that tie School Board of Education members hands to make the best decision for their towns. We need to protect parents right to have concerns about access to obscene sexual illustrations and the ability to make comments. I have included a few passages from books I object to that we have in some of our school libraries. This bill limits BOE's from making policy that falls into restrictive categories. Parents should make the decisions.

Anthony Barca: I oppose because the bill transfers authority over explicit sexually material in libraries from Boards of Education to librarians (lines 48,64). This violates the PICO Supreme Court decision that permits BOE's to exclude materials not educationally suitable which can include gender ideology (lines 57,60) It excludes community members from challenging books and reviewing policy development.

Dana Barrow, First Selectman, Town of Scotland: The library review board must contain a resident of the town and a member of the Town Board of Educators.

L. Rossi-Barrow: This bill removes guardians and parents from the decision-making process regarding children and their education. The library committee should be non-partisan contain members of the general community and consider the wellbeing of the children.

Susan Bradford: The state should not exclude members of a town or city from being heard and the ability to bring a complaint. The bill prescribes a need for a policy and a library review board but then undermines the authority of the duly elected Board of Education by imposing its own dictates from lines 48-65. Everything after lines 47 should be eliminated and stop trampling the authority of the BOE.

Jeff Cleghorn, Esq.

As former military and previous commentator on MSNBC, CNN and Fox News regarding gay rights matters I am fighting the scourge of transqueer ideology. This is harming children, LGBTQ, and women. I am in line with the Family Institute of Connecticut's concerns along with R.J. Preece's call for an independent state investigation into the transqueer lobby. Included in my testimony are links to my precious testimonies.

Mona Colwell, Intercessors for America: We fought this bill last year and it is still true that an employee of a school district is accountable to the public and the Board of Education. It is highly irresponsible to restrict access and prevent the opportunity to object to questionable material during this time when pornographic material is prevalent.

Anne Manusky National Director, Ct. Republican Assembly: With 550 members and friends with conservative views across Connecticut we stand firm in our principles and rights under the Constitution as well as the rights within the Connecticut Constitution. As a resident for 26 years and a former CT LPC, I dropped my license when the CT General Assembly voted to enact conversion therapy into law. Parents have the right to raise their children as

they want. At one time when parents sent their children to public school or a public library, they knew their child would receive an education and were safe. Parents are now concerned that local public schools are pushing psychological and gender ideological programming. The Constitution guarantees free speech, but the Supreme Court provides that obscenity is not a protected right and under the First Amendment does not include obscene materials such as books. No one should have access to pornographic, obscene vulgar materials and two library workers have been convicted of possessing child porn on site in Connecticut. Both public schools and libraries receiving federal funds should be scrutinized if that funding is being used for good or harm.

R.J Preece, Gay Right Advocate: I call for an independent investigation of the transqueer lobby and its impact on elected officials including organizations advocating gender/queer ideology, profitable trans medical markets including the marketing support services in schools and libraries affecting its citizens. Many governments around the world are pressing the pause button on transgender/queer madness.

Leslie Wolfgang, Director of Public Policy, Family Institute of Connecticut: Our libraries and communities benefit from having parents involved including book challenges that provides an outlet for discussion. This is not about librarians not being able to put books on a shelf but preserving the ability to talk about these books thru a fair and controlled process. I have included in my testimony specific portions of the bill that we have objections and specific images from books in our school libraries.

Frances Clark: I oppose any bill that transfers authority from Boards of Education to librarians or restricts BOE's. Appropriate material is likely to be based on ALA standards or state guidance that encourages sexually explicit materials. Parents pay taxes so their input must be heard and acted upon.

Dan Kleinman: This bill is being molded by the American Library Association that has worked to indoctrinate children to inappropriate materials. It enshrines their bill of rights by limiting federal and state constitutional rights to seek redress by only a few while all others are denied constitutional rights. The bill requires librarians be certified only by attending an ALA school that includes DEI classes. The bill directly violates the Supreme Court decision on Board of Education v. Pico that allows materials to be removed immediately if deemed unsuitable. This is all ALA's wish list.

Jackie Homan, Greenwich Patriots: We oppose any bill that gives authority to librarians over local Board of Education and deems material appropriate based on state guidance or ALA standards. Parents, community, boards of education and school staff should work together and share responsibility and not a single person.

Manju Gerber: As a parent and taxpayer this bill does not support parents living in a school district. In 1925 in Pierce vs the Society of Sisters the Supreme Court found unanimously that parents had the legal duty to educate their children. In 1982 the Supreme Court then in Board of Education vs Pico created an exception for removal of library books. You can't give one group protection, the librarian, and not give protection to parents. The focus should be getting strong academic education that does not give exposure to materials of sexual graphic nature. Consider adding a line of support to parental rights to the bill.

Michael Molgano, Stamford: We have built a culture in Connecticut requiring parents to fight for protections against sexually explicit materials in children's libraries. Librarians are protected by laws that prohibit harassment, libel and provide other civil liberties. No member is authorized to walk into a library and remove books. Child pornography is rampant, and no adult should be sharing images of sexual intercourse, sex toys or recommending porn to minors without the consent of their parent. Our children deserve their childhood and sexual intercourse education remains with responsible parents.

Mary Nagy: Pornography is defined as material of sexual nature to incite feelings of sexual arousal and is a Class D Felony. This bill limits the ability of the public, parents and Boards of Educations to complain, restrict, remove and voice dissent with public school library materials. Books, displays, and links to videos of obscene and pornographic content should not be available to children in schools.

Shannon Turner: As the parent of a child (minor) I have seen graphic novels that show graphic sex acts and uses graphic sexual language. There is no justification to showing this to minors. This is not about censorship it is about keeping inappropriate content out of the hands of minors in our libraries.

Kate Prokop, President, and Founder, CTRAMM: The bill allows sexually explicit and pornographic materials to remain in Connecticut's school libraries and shields schools and libraries from legal accountability. The bill prevents parents from taking action to protect their children from exposure to inappropriate content. The roll of libraries is to foster learning, critical thinking, and age-appropriate exploration not to expose them to sexually explicit content under literary freedom. If an adult allows a child access to explicit material outside of school, is it is contributing to the delinquency of a minor and a criminal offense. Why should a school or library be exempt. Legislation should require a review process for full transparency so parents can see what books are available and protect parents' rights while maintaining legal accountability.

Over 40 people submitted testimony in opposition of the bill:

Six people submitted Anonymous testimony in opposition of the bill:

Reported by: Pamela Bianca

Date: 4/17/25