

# NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP

# KIDS' RIGHT TO READ

March 13, 2025

Monroe County Schools  
School Board  
205 Oak Grove Rd,  
Madisonville, TN 37354

Dear Members of the Board,

The National Coalition Against Censorship is an alliance of national nonprofit groups dedicated to protecting freedom of expression, including the rights of K-12 students, teachers, and staff. We are writing to object to your school district's removal of over 500 books from school libraries.

According to media reports,<sup>1</sup> the District has removed 574 books from school libraries, ostensibly to comply with recent changes to Tennessee's Age-Appropriate Materials Act.<sup>2</sup> The law prohibits school libraries from having materials that are "patently offensive" or contain nudity, sexual content, or excessive violence that is not "suitable for the age and maturity levels of the students who may access the materials." The law is exceedingly broad, vague, and has created a dramatic increase in censorship in Tennessee's public schools.<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, in applying this law, the District must still abide by both the First Amendment and its mission to educate students. Books may only be removed for patent offensiveness – a very high bar unlikely to be triggered by approved titles in the library collection – or age-inappropriate content – which is a determination that should be made by a diverse group of stakeholders responsible for adjudicating book challenges. While Director of Schools Kristi Windsor confirmed in a media report that "...our school system took necessary steps during the summer of 2024 and into the 2024-2025 school year to ensure compliance with recent amendments to the Tennessee Age-Appropriate Materials Act,"<sup>4</sup> she did not provide any information about the review process.

It seems extremely unlikely that a comprehensive assessment of the educational value of 574 books could have taken place so quickly. Excluding material because it may be subjectively considered "inappropriate" and "questionable" potentially affects a wide range of materials that address race, gender, religion, sex, political violence, history,

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<sup>1</sup> Dague, Olivia. "574 Books Removed from Monroe County Schools Libraries." WBIR.com, 26 Feb. 2025, [www.wbir.com/article/news/education/monroe-county-schools-book-bans/51-bd18b5f6-c45a-4568-bbac-7abc2f08561f](http://www.wbir.com/article/news/education/monroe-county-schools-book-bans/51-bd18b5f6-c45a-4568-bbac-7abc2f08561f).

<sup>2</sup> Public Acts of 2024, Chapter No. 782. 4 Apr. 2024, [publications.tnsosfiles.com/acts/113/pub/pc0782.pdf](http://publications.tnsosfiles.com/acts/113/pub/pc0782.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Latham, Angele. "Tennessee Sees Surge in Books Banned in Public Schools. Here's Which Ones and Why." The Tennessean, Nashville Tennessean, 16 Feb. 2025,

[www.tennessean.com/story/news/education/2025/02/16/banned-books-list-tennessee-schools/78029007007/](http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/education/2025/02/16/banned-books-list-tennessee-schools/78029007007/).

<sup>4</sup> Dague, Olivia. "574 Books Removed from Monroe County Schools Libraries." WBIR.com, 26 Feb. 2025,

science, politics, the environment, or any other issue on which people may disagree. When book challenge adjudications are made pursuant to a comprehensive committee review, it is less likely that decisions will be the result of political pressure or other improper considerations. Comprehensive reviews help ensure that a library collection will reflect the needs of all students.

The books removed from Monroe County School libraries include classic works in the canon of American literature. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *The Color Purple* are all Pulitzer Prize winning novels. *The Lord of the Flies*, *Animal Farm*, and *The Outsiders* are among many novels that are included in curriculum all over the country. The removal of hundreds of books by the District en masse is educationally misguided, disrespectful of teachers' educational competence, and legally questionable.

Aside from the damage it will potentially do to the school library collection, singling out books with disfavored content raises serious First Amendment concerns. Schools are prohibited from discriminating against "the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable," *Texas v. Johnson*, 491 U.S. 397, 414 (1989). This risk of a constitutional violation is particularly high where decisions about the age propriety of hundreds of school library books are made without teacher involvement, indicating that these titles were removed for the ideas they express rather than for educational value.

We strongly urge the district to reinstate all 574 books to libraries and to promptly reaffirm the educational value of these texts. Denying students the ability to read and study important texts undermines the education of students.

I am attaching a copy of our guidelines for administrators, which includes sample book challenge procedures from school districts across the country. We believe that a strong policy is in the best interest of everyone in the district. Effective book challenge procedures ensure that the district protects the free expression rights of its students and staff, and help avoid constitutional liability.

Please let us know if you have any questions or need any further support in this matter.

Sincerely,



Christine Emeran  
Youth Free Expression Program Director  
National Coalition Against Censorship

Co-signed by: American Booksellers for Free Expression  
The Authors Guild  
Children's and Young Adult Books Committee, PEN America  
National Council of Teachers of English  
PEN America  
Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

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