

ACLU of Wisconsin: Files open record requests with six school districts that recently banned books

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The ACLU of Wisconsin today filed records requests with six school districts – Menomonee Falls, Howard-Suamico, Waukesha, Elmbrook, Elkhorn, and Kenosha Unified school districts – seeking information about the decision to ban books from school libraries.

School officials have removed books in these six districts in response to pressure campaigns from extremist parent groups.

The letter to the school districts accompanying the requests notes that removing books from school libraries threatens the First Amendment rights of students and their families. The Supreme Court held over 40 years ago that “local school boards may not remove books from school library shelves simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books.”

“Book banning has historically been used to marginalize underrepresented and disempowered voices and communities. We are particularly troubled by the dangerous anti- LGBTQ+ rhetoric accompanying much of the recent book-banning advocacy. Nationally, LGBTQ+ youth are far more likely to be bullied and harassed at school, alienated from their families and communities, and suffer from depression and suicidal ideation than their non- LGBTQ+ peers. For LGBTQ+ youth who are isolated at home, in school, or in their community, access to LGBTQ+ representation or information in books and literature can be a refuge – and, in some cases, life-saving,” said Tim Muth, interim legal director of the ACLU of Wisconsin.

“Under the guise of protecting students from ‘inappropriate’ materials, school

districts that remove books are violating students' First Amendment rights to receive information from various viewpoints, even challenging perspectives and views that may not sit well with conservative majorities," Muth said.

Grassroots Menomonee Falls, a group of concerned residents of the Menomonee School District, said the following:

"At a time when the world is in turmoil, we have the opportunity to bring liberation and connection. There is freedom within libraries and public schools to be a sanctuary for diverse perspectives, expression, and healing. Banning books in our school district is akin to closing the door to understanding ourselves, each other, and the world. Grassroots Menomonee Falls Area stands with the professionals in our public schools and libraries in advocating for the rights of books to remain on the shelves for all to explore and guide us toward a future where knowledge and hope know boundaries. Let every book be a beacon, not a forbidden fruit."

This press release is available online: aclu-wi.org/en/press-releases/aclu-wisconsin-files-open-record-requests-six-school-districts-recently-banned-books