

THE SENATE  
STATE OF NEW YORK



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## Senator May Leads Fight for the Right to Read

### Ensures Students and the Public Have Access to a Diverse Collection of Reading Materials in Libraries

(Albany, NY) Senator Rachel May (48th Senate District) passed her Freedom to Read Act and Open Shelves Act through the Senate, ensuring that school and public libraries offer access to a wide variety of age-appropriate materials. This legislation is a response to a national effort to ban books from libraries and classrooms, primarily targeting those that help readers understand our society, history, and personal identity from diverse perspectives.

“New York’s commitment to free expression for all our residents, in their rich diversity, has to be unwavering. We must ensure students and readers visiting our libraries have access to a broad range of materials to let them pursue a love of learning and reading. My bills ensure that readers have access to a variety of perspectives that can enrich their minds and broaden their understanding. Whether they embrace or reject those perspectives, the opportunity to explore challenging ideas is valuable to development as learners and as active participants in our society,” said Senator Rachel May. “I look forward to working with Assembly Members Simone and Kelles in the remainder of the session to secure passage in that chamber as well.”

- Freedom to Read Act ([S.1099](#)) requires the commissioner of education and school library systems to establish policies that empower school libraries and their staff to curate and develop collections. This ensures that students have access to a wide range of developmentally appropriate materials.
- Open Shelves Act ([S.1100](#)) will set guidelines for libraries to adopt policies ensuring that library staff can curate collections, services, and programming that reflect the diverse interests in their communities.

According to PEN America, instances of book banning remained high during the 2023-2024 school year, with more than 10,000 books removed from public schools. PEN America reports that 220 public school districts in 29 states have banned books. In New York, 21 school districts have banned books, with 65 instances of books being removed. Florida topped the list with a total of 4,561 instances of banned books. The organization found that the books banned were primarily about race and LGBTQ+ topics and themes.

Extensive research shows that children are more excited and, therefore, more likely to read books featuring characters with whom they can identify. Moreover, "protecting" children from negative information or harsh realities about issues like the history of slavery or injustice makes them less resilient and less vigilant about preventing such outcomes in the future.

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