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PEN America Report: Worst Year for Book Bans Ever

Senator May and Assemblymember Simone Call on Governor Hochul to Protect New York Libraries

(Syracuse, NY) [PEN America](#) found that nearly 12,000 books were banned over the past year. Senator Rachel May is now warning that New York must act quickly so widespread book bans do not affect New York students. Senator May's Freedom to Read Act ([S8360/A9537](#)) passed the Senate and Assembly last legislative session. With the latest data from PEN America, it is now more urgent than ever for Governor Hochul to sign the legislation.

"We're now seeing more book bans than ever. This problem is not going away, and we are not immune in New York. Students need access to a broad range of materials that encourage a love of reading and learning. My Freedom to Read Act helps ensure that trained professionals make decisions about school library collections and protects students' ability to learn and engage with the world around them. I urge Governor Hochul to sign the Freedom to Read Act," said Senator Rachel May.

Efforts to remove books from schools have increased in New York. Since 2020, hundreds of complaints have been filed in school districts across the state, and some have led to books being removed from shelves. The [New York Civil Liberties Union](#) reports that Moms for Liberty consistently works to ban books in New York. NYCLU said a growing number of challenges negatively affect school districts and educators, causing some to think twice about which books to teach or offer in libraries. The Freedom to Read Act would give schools and educators a clear process and more support when deciding which books are available to students.

"Book bans are about fear of ideas, and the Freedom to Read Act is about protecting the freedom to learn," said Assemblymember Tony Simone. "As a closeted gay kid, books helped me understand who I was and see myself reflected in the world. We urge Governor Hochul to sign this bill and ensure New York never allows book bans," Assemblymember Tony Simone, Assembly Sponsor.

“The Freedom to Read Act passed both houses of the New York State Legislature this year. If Governor Hochul signs it, every school district will have to establish a policy to govern book bans. The library is often the first place where a young person can pursue answers to their own questions, learn more about something happening in their family or social surroundings, or explore an idea they are not ready to share. Removing a book does not make a lived experience disappear. A student who is gay does not become straight because books with gay characters are gone. A child experiencing abuse is not protected by removing a book that could help them recognize it. Taking books about racism off a shelf does not erase racism or prepare students to understand its history. Book banning only limits the information available to students,” Assemblymember Anna Kelles (District 125), Assembly Sponsor of Open Shelves Act [\(S1100\)](#).

“As threats to library materials continue advancing across the United States, it is essential that we act with urgency to safeguard access for students and library users here in New York. Our state is not exempt from attacks on intellectual freedom, and we have seen efforts to limit access to books and programming mounted in communities from Long Island to Western New York. Our young people have a right to see themselves represented in the collections offered by their school and public libraries, as well as to hone critical thinking skills through engagement with content that represents diverse experiences and viewpoints they might find challenging. NYLA calls on Governor Hochul to act with expediency to sign the Freedom to Read Act and protect our school libraries today,” said AnnaLee Dragon, New York Library Association Executive Director.

“Nearly 12,000 book bans in a single school year is not just a statistic—it’s a warning” says Skip Dye, PRH SVP, Institutional Markets & Digital Strategy and Chair of the PRH Intellectual Freedom Taskforce.” With book bans at record levels, New York has an opportunity to lead by signing the Freedom to Read Act into law. We trust our librarians, we value the voices of authors, and we believe readers should be free to decide for themselves what they read.”

According to PEN America, instances of book banning are the highest level since records began five years ago. PEN found nearly 11,982 book-banning cases, with more than 7,370 titles banned over the past year. The organization found that the banned books were primarily about race and LGBTQ+ topics and themes.

Report Link: <https://pen.org/report/book-bans-spotlight-2026/>

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