

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Signs Freedom to Read Act

Posted on - 12/9/2024

*Law Protects Intellectual Freedom at New Jersey Libraries*

**PRINCETON** – Governor Phil Murphy today signed into law A3446/S2421, known as the Freedom to Read Act, which prevents arbitrary book banning and protects the rights of students, parents, and communities to have free access to age-appropriate books and learning materials at schools and public libraries. The Governor signed the bill at the Princeton Public Library, joined by advocates for intellectual freedom and the bill’s legislative sponsors.

“The Freedom to Read Act cements New Jersey’s role on the forefront of preventing book bans and protecting the intellectual freedom of our educators and students. Across the nation, we have seen attempts to suppress and censor the stories and experiences of others. I’m proud to amplify the voices of our past and present, as there is no better way for our children to prepare for the future than to read freely,” **said Governor Murphy**.

“Part of our responsibility as educators and education policymakers is to empower students by providing access to diverse ideas, knowledge, and perspectives,” **said Acting Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer**. “The Freedom to Read Act demonstrates our commitment to the educational excellence that defines our state. Through this legislation, we are protecting the integrity of our libraries that are curated by dedicated professionals and making those resources available to help every student to grow as a critical thinker.”

“The Freedom to Read Act exemplifies New Jersey’s commitment to providing residents with access to high quality library materials, while also acknowledging that the needs of local communities and schools differ. With this Act, New Jersey has assured that local interests guide the development of local collections based on local needs,” **said Jennifer R. Nelson, New Jersey State Librarian**.

Today’s legislation requires local school boards and governing bodies of public libraries to establish policies for curation and removal of library materials, including a system of review to address concerns over library materials. The Department of Education, the State Librarian, the New Jersey Association of School Librarians, and the New Jersey School Boards Association will support establishing these policies.

The Freedom to Read Act also provides protections for library staff members against civil and criminal lawsuits related to complying with this law.

Under the law, boards of education and governing boards of public libraries are barred from excluding books because of the origin, background, or views of the material or of its authors. Further, boards of education and governing boards of public libraries are prevented from censoring library material based on a disagreement with a viewpoint, idea, or concept, or solely because an individual finds certain content offensive, unless they are restricting access to developmentally inappropriate material for certain age groups.

The primary sponsors of the [Freedom to Read Act \(https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/bill-search/2024/S2421\)](https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/bill-search/2024/S2421) are Senator Andrew Zwicker, Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz, Assemblywoman Michelle Drulis, Assemblywoman Shavonda E. Sumter, and Assemblyman Herb Conaway Jr.

“The freedom to read and to freely access information is an essential part of a quality education and a core

component of our democracy,” **said Senate President Nick Scutari.** “This law will help New Jersey libraries guard against politically-inspired censorship and protect librarians from harassment for simply doing their job. I commend Senator Zwicker and Senate Majority Leader Ruiz for their principled commitment to this issue.”

“The freedom to read is essential for a healthy democracy and foundational for lifelong learning. This law will provide protections for that right as well as ensure community input for clear standards regarding age-appropriate material in schools and public libraries,” **said Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin.** “Local school and library boards, accountable to their constituents, will have a fair, standardized process to review requests for changes, free from intimidation. I thank the sponsors of this legislation as well as all the educators and librarians who have dedicated their lives to sharing knowledge and exchanging ideas. We all benefit from their work.”

“Our libraries are a sacred community resource, not a place for censorship. The materials they offer should not be restricted based on partisan views or revisionist history,” **said Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz.** “Libraries often provide the foundation for children’s education and become incubators of ideas. We must protect these critical institutions and the librarians who provide information that is instrumental in shaping young minds.”

“Public and school libraries have come under attack by a small number of individuals hoping to erase diverse materials from bookshelves, usually targeting works focused on race and LGBTQ+ themes. Today, New Jersey stands firmly in defense of the freedom to read and the importance of inclusive educational spaces,” **said Senator Andrew Zwicker.** “A library is a place of voluntary inquiry and provides equitable access to learning resources. Today, we ensure that every New Jerseyan has the freedom to choose what they want to read, and parents will continue to have the freedom to choose what their children read. But no one else gets to decide for you. That, quite simply, is the ‘Freedom to Read.’”

“School libraries and public libraries are centers for voluntary inquiry, playing a unique role in promoting intellectual freedom, providing equitable access to learning resources, and promoting democracy,” **said Assemblywoman Drulis.** “This bill does not remove parental rights; instead, it provides a structured, transparent process for parents to challenge materials they may find inappropriate. Parents will continue to have the right to decide what their own child reads, but one parent should not have the ability to solely determine what another parents’ child can read.”

“Access to diverse literary resources is fundamental to fostering intellectual growth and cultural understanding,” **said Assemblywoman Sumter.** “We must protect this right and ensure equitable access to diverse perspectives. These rights extend beyond the school door and into our public libraries. We cannot, must not, and will not compromise on equitable access to these vital resources.”

“Today, we are taking significant steps to ensure that our school libraries remain a stronghold of knowledge and intellectual diversity, reflecting a commitment to protecting the rights of students to access a broad range of ideas while respecting their developmental needs,” **said Assemblyman Conaway.** “By implementing a thorough review process, we fortify our educational system against the suppression of certain viewpoints while simultaneously providing safeguards for librarians and educators acting in good faith.”

“We are honored to be hosting this bill-signing. Senator Zwicker is a frequent visitor to our library, which, thanks to a collaboration with our local elected officials, is in a book sanctuary town. Like everyone who works in libraries, our staff followed the progress of the Freedom to Read Bill. We’re thrilled to be here to see the bill become law,” **said Jennifer Podolsky, Executive Director, Princeton Public Library.**

“The New Jersey School Boards Association believes this legislation achieves a thoughtful and practical balance. It preserves local control and the authority of boards of education, ensures students have access to developmentally appropriate library materials, respects the vital role of school library staff, and recognizes that parents and the school community may have concerns about certain materials. We appreciate the collaborative approach the sponsors took in crafting this legislation and their effort to strengthen the authority of local boards of education,” **said Timothy Purnell, Executive Director and CEO of the New Jersey School Boards Association.**

“Over the past several years, there has been an increase in attempts to restrict the collections that are carefully curated by New Jersey’s libraries. These attempts to remove books frequently come from outside the municipalities where these libraries are located, often from out of state. We are grateful to Governor Murphy and this legislation’s sponsors in the Senate and Assembly. They are helping to ensure that New Jersey residents continue to enjoy the constitutionally protected freedom to decide what they want to read,” **said Brett Bonfield, Executive Director, New Jersey Library Association.**

"The Freedom to Read Act recognizes the professionalism, honor, work ethics and performance of school and public library staff. It promotes libraries as trusted sources of information and recognizes the many roles that libraries play in students' lives. The bill will protect the intellectual freedom of students as well as acknowledge that school libraries are centers for voluntary inquiry, fostering students' growth and development. Additionally, we are grateful for the broad coalition of support from so many organizations for this legislation," **said New Jersey Association of School Librarians President Karen Grant.**

"The Freedom to Read Act is a crucial piece of legislation that safeguards the fundamental right of all New Jersey residents to access diverse and inclusive materials in public and school libraries. This act protects intellectual freedom by prohibiting censorship and ensuring that library materials are not removed based on personal opinions or beliefs," **said Richard Bozza, Executive Director, New Jersey Association of School Administrators.**

"Public education is the indispensable foundation of a strong democracy," **said NJEA President Sean Spiller.** "For our democracy to thrive, students must be free to read, explore, learn and grow. This important law protects New Jersey's students from harmful attempts to censor their access to information and limit their learning. In one of the most diverse states in the nation, every student should have access to literature where they can see themselves reflected and also where they can learn about others who have different life experiences. I am proud to side with students and parents against censors and book banners."

"The Freedom to Read Act is a thoughtful approach to balancing the diverse needs of our school communities while preserving the integrity of our school libraries. We commend Senator Zwicker and Assemblywoman Drulis for leading this important initiative and thank Governor Murphy for signing it into law. This new process is both fair and transparent, ensuring our students will have access to library materials that inspire, inform, and reflect their experiences while addressing concerns in a meaningful and equitable way," **said Karen A. Bingert, Executive Director of NJ Principals and Supervisors Association.**

"After three years of harassment, I can finally celebrate. Thanks to the NJ Freedom to Read Act, library users now have protections to read about the topics that interest them. When concerns about books arise, parents now have a clear process for raising issues without resorting to bullying. And for librarians across the state, the dignity of our work will now be recognized and preserved," **said Martha Hickson, retired high school librarian** who spoke at Monday's bill signing.

"The Freedom to Read Act promotes equitable access to library resources, affirms the important roles of school and public librarians, and sets forth sensible guidelines for curation of and challenges to library materials. We are grateful to the sponsors for shepherding this important bill through the legislative process," **said Betsy Ginsburg, Executive Director of the Garden State Coalition of Schools.**

"Governor Murphy just made it clear: in New Jersey, censorship loses, and freedom wins. At a time when access to diverse and inclusive materials is under attack across the nation, this legislation sends a powerful message that New Jersey will stand firm in protecting intellectual freedom and fostering a culture of understanding and inclusion," **said Christian Fuscarino, Executive Director of Garden State Equality.** "Every student and community member in New Jersey has the right to access age-appropriate library materials without fear of censorship or harassment. Garden State Equality extends our heartfelt gratitude to Senate Majority Leaders Teresa Ruiz and Senator Andrew Zwicker for their leadership and to co-sponsors Senators McKnight, McKeon, Smith, Mukherji, Stack, and Burgess for championing this critical initiative to protect the rights of our educators, librarians, and the communities they serve."

"The Hoboken Free Public Library thanks Governor Murphy and Senator Zwicker for affirming our right to read freely," **said Jennie Pu, Director of Hoboken Public Library and Co-Chair of the New Jersey Library Association Public Policy Committee.**

"By signing the Freedom to Read Act into law, New Jersey reaffirms its leadership in defending intellectual freedom and democracy," **said SWEEP NJ Founder Rosalie M. Wong and Director of Advocacy and Organizing Louise Walpin.** "Senator Zwicker and Assemblywoman Drulis stood as profiles in courage, pushing back against book bans and the weaponization of obscenity laws. They protected librarians like Martha Hickson, who faced harassment but persevered in her commitment to free access to books. This law ensures all communities, including immigrants, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people of color, can see themselves in literature, safeguarding an honest account of our shared history for generations to come."

"FAB is honored to be present at the signing ceremony of the Freedom to Read Bill. We thank all of the sponsors, co-

sponsors, and Governor Murphy for the steadfast commitment to protections against censorship. We commend you for understanding that our great State of New Jersey is comprised of people from all walks of life- each as deserving of representation as the next. In particular, during this period of time where the transgender and gender-nonconforming population is fighting for basic human rights, the access to books representing the community is an essential first step to this end. We look forward to working with legislators to keep making strides for our community's future," **said Denise Rachel Troy, Friends and Allies of Babs Siperstein (FAB).**

"Access to books through public libraries and public-school libraries is an essential component to our public education system. The Freedom to Read Act ensures that access to books continues, that library personnel are also protected, and that only a child's parents get to decide what a child reads," **said Jennifer S. Higgins, President, AFT New Jersey.**

"In enacting the Freedom to Read Act, New Jersey is living up to its values by protecting the fundamental rights to freely speak, think, read, and write – especially for those who are most vulnerable. We're grateful to Governor Murphy, Senate Majority Leader Ruiz, and Senator Zwicker for their leadership and commitment to strengthening our democracy," **said ACLU-NJ Policy Director Sarah Fajardo.**

"We are grateful to Governor Murphy, the Legislature, and Senator Zwicker for their leadership on the Freedom to Read Act. Through our Teach Asian American Stories initiative, we have witnessed first-hand how important it is for children to see themselves reflected in the books they read and the stories they learn. We are proud to have been part of the broad coalition of parents, youth, educators, librarians, and community organizations who advocated for this law, which will foster safer and more inclusive schools and communities and promote our most cherished freedoms," **said Roslyne Shiao, Co-Executive Director, AAPI New Jersey.**

"We applaud our dear friend Governor Murphy's meaningful action moving this forward. Following a year in which there were more challenges & bans than ever on record & even more devastatingly, attacks on our queer community & trans kids specifically, our Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice Defenders of the Right to Read, a collective of everyday heroes standing up for everyone's essential right to read, have been on the frontlines speaking out against book bans & censorship. Much respect to our stalwart ally, Senator Andrew Zwicker, for his tireless efforts to defend our intellectual freedoms & to all the educators & librarians who strive to provide valuable, educational, & diverse texts for all of New Jersey's students, parents, & the greater community as a whole. We were extraordinarily proud to be of service in the nascent stages of this integral law that will protect students' First Amendment rights & preserve our very Democracy. At its core, the Freedom to Read Act will ensure that LGBTQIA+ youth see themselves reflected back in the pages of books, feel safe in our sacred libraries, & ensure that they can read freely to allow themselves to live openly. Representation matters & access is essential," **said Robt Martin Seda-Schreiber, Chief Activist of the Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice.**

"The Sikh Coalition is proud to have supported this legislation, and we are gratified to see it become law in New Jersey," **said Harmeet Kaur Kamboj, Sikh Coalition Senior State Policy Manager.** "Ensuring that students learn about underrepresented communities is essential to combat the early development of bias, which left unattended, can fester and grow into fear or even hate. The Freedom to Read Act is a critical step towards this more holistic education because it protects diverse books—a key gateway for young people to learn about experiences different from their own—from politically motivated censorship."

## Governor Phil Murphy

[Home \(/governor/\)](#)

[Administration](#)

[Governor Phil Murphy \(/governor/admin/about\)](#)

[Lt. Governor Tahesha Way \(/governor/admin/lt\)](#)

[In memoriam of Lt. Governor Sheila Y. Oliver \(/governor/admin/lt-sheila-y-oliver\)](#)

[Senior Staff \(/governor/admin/staff\)](#)

[Cabinet \(/governor/admin/cabinet/\)](/governor/admin/cabinet/)

[Office of Climate Action and the Green Economy \(/governor/climateaction/\)](/governor/climateaction/)

[Office of Equity \(/governor/admin/equity/\)](/governor/admin/equity/)

[Office of Health Care Affordability and Transparency](/governor/admin/affordablehealthcare/index.shtml)

[\(/governor/admin/affordablehealthcare/index.shtml\)](/governor/admin/affordablehealthcare/index.shtml)

[Boards, Commissions & Authorities \(/governor/admin/bca\)](/governor/admin/bca)

[New Jersey Puerto Rico Commission \(https://www.nj.gov/puertoricocommission/\)](https://www.nj.gov/puertoricocommission/)

[Internship Opportunities \(/governor/admin/internship.shtml\)](/governor/admin/internship.shtml)

[Governor's Fellows Program \(/governor/admin/fellows\)](/governor/admin/fellows)

[Governor's Residence - Drumthwacket \(http://drumthwacket.org/\)](http://drumthwacket.org/)

## Key Initiatives

[Economy & Jobs \(/governor/initiatives/#Economy\)](/governor/initiatives/#Economy)

[Education \(/governor/initiatives/#Education\)](/governor/initiatives/#Education)

[Environment \(/governor/initiatives/#Environment\)](/governor/initiatives/#Environment)

[Health \(/governor/initiatives/#Health\)](/governor/initiatives/#Health)

[Law & Justice \(/governor/initiatives/#Justice\)](/governor/initiatives/#Justice)

[Transportation \(/governor/initiatives/#Transportation\)](/governor/initiatives/#Transportation)

## News & Events

[Press Releases \(/governor/news/news/562024/approved/news\\_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/news/562024/approved/news_archive.shtml)

[Photos \(https://www.flickr.com/photos/govmurphy\)](https://www.flickr.com/photos/govmurphy)

[Public Addresses \(/governor/news/addresses\)](/governor/news/addresses)

[Executive Orders \(/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo\\_archive.html\)](/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo_archive.html)

[Administrative Orders \(/governor/news/ao/approved/ao\\_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/ao/approved/ao_archive.shtml)

[Direct Appointments \(/governor/news/appointments\)](/governor/news/appointments)

[Advice and Consent Appointments \(/governor/news/acappointments\)](/governor/news/acappointments)

[Statements on Legislation \(/governor/news/statements/approved/statements\\_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/statements/approved/statements_archive.shtml)

[Administration Reports \(/governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml)

[Transition Reports \(/governor/news/reports/approved/reports\\_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml)

[Press Kits \(/governor/news/press\)](/governor/news/press)

## Social

[Facebook \(https://www.facebook.com/governorphilmurphy/\)](https://www.facebook.com/governorphilmurphy/)

[Twitter \(https://twitter.com/GovMurphy\)](https://twitter.com/GovMurphy)

[Instagram \(https://www.instagram.com/govmurphy/\)](https://www.instagram.com/govmurphy/)

Snapchat (<https://www.snapchat.com/add/philmurphy>)

YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/njgovernorsoffice>)

## Contact Us

Scheduling Requests (</governor/contact/scheduling/>)

Contact Us (</governor/contact/all/>)

## Statewide

**[NJ Home \(//www.nj.gov\)](//www.nj.gov)**

**[Services A to Z \(//www.nj.gov/nj/gov/njgov/alphaserv.html\)](//www.nj.gov/nj/gov/njgov/alphaserv.html)**

**[Departments/Agencies \(//www.nj.gov/nj/gov/deptserv/\)](//www.nj.gov/nj/gov/deptserv/)**

**[FAQs \(//www.nj.gov/faqs/\)](//www.nj.gov/faqs/)**

**[Contact Us \(//www.nj.gov/nj/feedback.html\)](//www.nj.gov/nj/feedback.html)**

**[Privacy Notice \(//www.nj.gov/nj/privacy.html\)](//www.nj.gov/nj/privacy.html)**

**[Legal Statement & Disclaimers \(//www.nj.gov/nj/legal.html\)](//www.nj.gov/nj/legal.html)**

**[Accessibility Statement \(//www.nj.gov/nj/accessibility.html\)](//www.nj.gov/nj/accessibility.html)**

[\(//nj.gov/opra/\)](//nj.gov/opra/)

[\(https://my.state.nj.us/openam/UI/Login\)](https://my.state.nj.us/openam/UI/Login)

[\(https://tech.nj.gov/\)](https://tech.nj.gov/)

Copyright © State of New Jersey, 1996-2024  
Office of Governor PO Box 001  
Trenton, NJ 08625  
609-292-6000