

STUDENT SENATE BILL 2024-1073

TITLE: A Resolution Condemning the Ban of 1,600 Books in the Escambia County School District

AUTHOR(S): Senator Hunter Monson, Senator Asif Islam, Senator Allan Rivera Jaramillo, Minority Party Leader Nathaniel Pelton

SPONSOR(S): Senator Raj Mia, Senator Elizabeth Insuasti, Volunteers for International Student Affairs Vice President of Internal Affairs Hana Ali

WHEREAS, according to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, to ban in the context of literature means “to prohibit the use, performance, or distribution of; to ban a book” [1]; and,

WHEREAS, banning books infringes upon individuals' intellectual freedom to make their own perceptions & interpretations regarding written material [2]; and,

WHEREAS, throughout history, book banning has been used by authoritarian regimes to control information & manipulate public opinion, which Congressman Jamie Raskin (MD-08) & Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI) claimed were attacks on the foundations of democracy & blatant infringements on First Amendment Rights [3]; and,

WHEREAS, in 2021 & the first half of 2022, over 41% of banned books consisted of LGBTQ+ characters or stories, which was undoubtedly the primary reasoning behind these bans [4]; and,

WHEREAS, in the latter half of 2022, most banned books spoke about sexual experiences, violence, or sexual health [4]; and,

WHEREAS, Florida State House Bill 1069 “provides district school boards are responsible for materials used in classroom libraries, revises provisions relating to objections of certain materials & processes related to such objections, & revises school principal, school district & district school board duties & responsibilities relating to certain materials & processes,” which was interpreted by the Escambia County School District with the banning of 1600 books including American Heritage Children’s Dictionary, Webster’s Dictionary for Students, and Merriam-Webster’s Elementary Dictionary [5]; and,

WHEREAS, all children living within the United States “have the right to a free public education... & shall be given equal educational opportunity no matter what their race, ethnic background, religion, or sex, or whether they are rich or poor, citizen or non-citizen [6]; and,

WHEREAS, as of January 11, 2024, there are currently over 3000 signatures on a petition condemning the book bans as “these efforts intentionally undermine public education and erase the marginalized voices & perspectives of people that would connect with the diverse student body in Florida public schools” [7]; and,

WHEREAS, the state of Florida faces a persistent challenge in combating low literacy rates with “the third-highest percentage of adults with basic prose literacy skills” with only an 80.3% literacy rate [8]; and,

WHEREAS, book bans disproportionately affect low-income students [9]; and,

WHEREAS, marginalized communities are some of the most significantly impacted by the book bans [9]; and,

WHEREAS, an NPR/Ipsos poll in 20,3 based on a nationally representative population, recorded that ⅔ of K-12 parents (as well as 69% of all Americans) oppose book bans passed by state lawmakers, and roughly 60% of K-12 parents (as well as 64% of all Americans) oppose book bans from individual school boards [10]; and,

WHEREAS, a 2023 study surveying educators in K-12 public schools recorded that 87% believe that book bans are rarely, if ever, justified, 60% believe that their school, or school district, generally opposes the book bans, & 63% believe that students of all ages benefit from consuming diverse material [11]; and,

WHEREAS, 63% of educators in K-12 public schools indicated that conversations surrounding banned books have impacted their ability to teach to some degree, 9% said that book banning played a significant impact on their teaching, & 65% stated that book banning had an overwhelmingly negative impact on their ability to teach [11]; and,

WHEREAS, according to UNICEF, when deprived of a quality education, “children face considerable barriers to employment later in life... & their ability to shape a better future for themselves and their societies,” demonstrating the importance of a diverse education where children not only have the opportunity to learn, but also where they can gain a broader worldwide perspective [12]; and,

WHEREAS, a quality education must consist of topics advocating for diversity, equity and inclusion as youth who “recognize the differences in genders, cultural backgrounds, or physical abilities will help them become more considerate citizens and address injustice and discrimination as they grow” [13]; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate recognizes that every child has the right to obtain a quality & diverse education unobstructed from politically motivated censorship [12]; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate firmly acknowledges that

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate condemns the Escambia County School District for infringing upon the schoolchildren’s right to a quality education, one of which would contain material cultivating personal-growth and perspective enrichment; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate calls for the immediate reversal of the wide-scale book ban by the Escambia County School District; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FINALLY BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate recognizes the importance of an education promoting diversity, equity, & inclusion initiatives to be taught to children in their formative years [13].

Proviso: A copy of this resolution shall be sent to University of Florida President Ben Sasse, Vice President for Student Life Dr. Heather White, Escambia County Interim Superintendent Keith Leonard, Escambia County Public School Board Member (District 1) Kevin Adams, Escambia County Public School Board Member (District 2) Paul H. Fetsko, Escambia County Public School Board Member (District 3) David Williams, Escambia County Public School Board Member (District 4) Patty Hightower, Escambia County Public School Board Member (District 5) Bill Slayton, Florida State Board of Education Chair Ben Gibson, Florida State Board of Education Vice Chair Ryan Petty

[1] <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ban#:~:text=also%20%3A%20to%20prohibit%20the%20use,ban%20a%20book>

[2]

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01616846.2023.2232289?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

[3] <https://raskin.house.gov/2023/9/raskin-schatz-reintroduce-resolution-recognizing-banned-books-week>

[4] https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/book-bans-over-the-years-in-charts/2023/04?s_kwcid=AL!6416!3!602270476281!!!g!!&utm_source=goog&utm_medium=cp&utm_campaign=ew+dynamic+recent&ccid=dynamic+ads+recent+articles&ccag=recent+articles+dynamic&cckw=&cccv=dynamic+ad&gclid=Cj0KCQiAwP6sBhDAARIsAPfK_wZ4llyXSx2uMAkpgbhapSVvhav50bVIA8DLYI7Bt_jU5N-mT1rwhdQaAh5kEALw_wcB

[5] <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2023/1069/BillText/er/PDF>

[6] <https://www.aclu.org/documents/your-right-equality-education#:~:text=All%20kids%20living%20in%20the,%2C%20citizen%20or%20non%2Dcitizen.>

[7] <https://www.fftrp.org/petition>

[8] <https://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/education/2023/09/21/books-bans-florida-pen-america-report-picture-health-lgbtq-people-of-color-book-banning-schools/70910852007/>

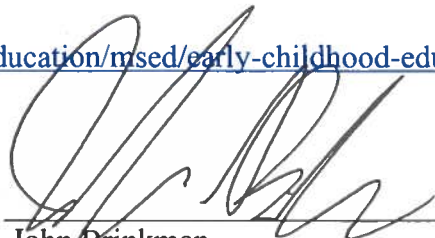
[9] <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/florida-escambia-school-district-dictionaries-b2477185.html>

[10] <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/americans-trust-teachers-some-still-want-parents-be-primary-voices-whats-taught>

[11] https://firstbook.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2023-Banned-Books-Survey-Results.pdf?utm_source=firstbook&utm_medium=page&utm_campaign=bannedbooksstudy

[12] <https://www.unicef.org/education>

[13] <https://online.nwmissouri.edu/programs/education/msed/early-childhood-edu/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-in-ece/>


John Brinkman
Senate President

2/7/2024
Date