



**Opening Statement of Rep. Aaron Bean (R-FL), Chairman
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
Hearing: “Protecting Kids: Combatting Graphic, Explicit Content in School
Libraries”**

October 19, 2023

(As prepared for delivery)

Before getting started, I would like to make a disclaimer that we are going to be handling some very sensitive, mature issues today. We will be discussing wildly inappropriate books that are accessible in school libraries. This kind of content is uncomfortable for Members of Congress, and it’s certainly inappropriate for young children.

As such, the Committee recommends that anyone with small children in the audience may want to reconsider their attendance here today. Additionally, children should not watch at home. We’re holding this hearing to help ensure that young children are never exposed to this kind of graphic content, not to further expose them to it.

With that warning out of the way, I’d like to extend a warm good morning to everyone here. Thank you for joining me for this timely and important Committee hearing.

Like every flashpoint in America’s culture war, the media has distorted the truth and fueled public outrage and discontent.

Today, the Committee will set the record straight for the American people: inappropriate books are in school libraries, and local communities are within their rights to remove them.

Now some of my Democrat colleagues will inevitably accuse Republicans of engaging in a widespread campaign to “ban” books because of racial animus or prejudice against LGBT students. However, none of the evidence suggests books are being removed for any reason other than inappropriate, explicit content.

In fact, seven of the 10 most frequently removed books feature explicit heterosexual content.

Additionally, the LGBT books being challenged by parents, such as *Lawn Boy* and *Gender Queer*, are so sexually explicit that their respective authors have advised that “nobody below a teenager is ready for that book,” and “I don’t recommend that book to kids.”

These books are so obscene that reciting mere passages has gotten adults censored in adult forums. School board officials in Clay County, Florida had to cut a father’s microphone for reading *Lucky* for fear that the explicit passages would violate FCC laws and regulations since the school board meeting was being televised. Late-night television refused to air an ad featuring language from *Gender Queer*.

If these books are too inappropriate for adults, they are certainly too inappropriate for children.

Then, the Committee must ask ourselves today, do communities have the right to remove inappropriate content from library shelves? Of course, they do. School boards, communities, and parents constantly set standards of decency.

But removing a book from a library shelf is not akin to pouring gasoline on it and setting it ablaze. It’s not criminalizing the ownership of the book. It’s not even making them less accessible.

If you can check out a book from a public library, it is not banned. If you can order a book from Amazon and have it delivered to your home the next day, it is not banned. In fact, the most-removed books are still wildly popular on Amazon.

Age-appropriate content moderation by local school districts is a right deeply engrained in the principles of localism and federalism. Federalizing the book review

process by putting it in the hands of DC bureaucrats, thereby taking parents out of the equation, would be the worst possible solution.

Yet, that is exactly what the Biden administration is doing. President Biden appointed a book review czar to monitor the actions of local school boards and potentially penalize them for simply reviewing books. I see this as a dangerous step and a violation of federalist principles.

Today's hearing should not be about creating more bureaucrats or more laws or scoring cheap political points, but about how to best empower parents to be the greatest possible advocate for their child's education.

My final appeal goes to parents. Keep demanding that your school board reflects the values of your communities. Keep involving yourself in your children's education. Most importantly, keep doing what's best for your kids.