



Literature and Books are Havens for the Young Mind

Testimony Against HB 900

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Over the last two years, Texas libraries and librarians – like their counterparts in other states – have been subject to consistent, targeted attacks on nearly every aspect of their day-to-day operations. HB 900 is a continuation of those attacks and should be rejected because it is a blatant attempt to score the favor of people who falsely believe that librarians do anything but dedicate their lives to the pursuit and protection of knowledge.

There have been moments and historical eras that saw similar anti-intellectual attempts to restrict the thoughts and ideas to which people, especially children, could be exposed. In the years leading up to the Enlightenment, the Catholic Church put Galileo in prison and then to death for daring to challenge their so-called divine order. During the Enlightenment, foundational thinkers of Western thought were decried as anti-Christian and persecuted by some governments. In the United States, we have consistently tried to restrict the information people can access based on the political winds of the day. HB 900 is another effort in a long line of the powerful few – this time well-moneyed out-of-state extremists – restricting the knowledge available to the powerless many who use library books to lift themselves out of the darkness of ignorance.

Texas refuses to teach kids about themselves, their history, and their culture, by limiting age appropriate, science-based health classes and access to intellectually honest social studies curriculums. Texas kids need to see themselves in library books because our state is consistently working to erase them from classroom learning materials. Books such as *Gender Queer* are not pornographic in nature just because they visually depict a body part or include descriptions of sexual activity, and the entire public school library system should not be attacked for having them in their collection. To the contrary, public school libraries should be allowed to continue doing what they have always done: carefully develop a well-rounded, inclusive library that allows students the breadth of resources to discover more about the world around them and about themselves.

Texas can try to eliminate *Gender Queer* all it wants, but it will not eliminate the students and lives who rely on books as havens from the hate and vitriol aimed at them by powerful, narrow-minded interests. Every Texan urges the Senate Education Committee to reject HB 900 and allow libraries to serve students according to their intellectually honest and age-appropriate professional standards.