



**SOLANO COUNTY
CIVIL GRAND JURY**

**Book Banning in
Solano County?**

May 1, 2024

Book Banning in Solano County?

Solano County Civil Grand Jury 2023-2024

I. SUMMARY

Because book banning has been well publicized nationally, Solano County citizens have shown interest in this topic. There are only three commercial newspapers within the county. A reduction in printed media limits opportunities to publicize to the community concerns about book banning. This also limits how the public within Solano County is exposed to facts about the topic. Therefore, those who do not read printed or online news are largely unaware of the book banning issue. Many people use electronic sources such as social media as their main source to obtain their daily news. The objective of this report is to make the relevant information more available to the public, i.e., including electronic forms.

II. INTRODUCTION

In July 2023, national news highlighted the issue of certain book bannings. On September 25, 2023, Governor Gavin Newsom signed California Assembly Bill 1078 (AB 1078) which bans rejecting public school library materials based on content. It focuses on the contributions of people from different cultures, racial backgrounds, sexual orientation, or gender identities. Although this law went into effect after our inquiries began, the Jury decided to clarify the effects of this new law in reference to both printed and electronic reading materials in public school libraries. The new law affects public school libraries. The Solano County public libraries follow principles for preventing book banning, as issued by the American Library Association (ALA) *Freedom to Read*. “Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.”

III. STATEMENTS OF FACTS

In our investigation we interviewed several librarians from the public school system, as well as librarians of public libraries in Solano County. They found the public at large, mainly parents of school children, had concerns about book banning. Many people don't realize that there is a procedure to request the banning of a book. Most people have no idea what that process is or how it is implemented and that, if desired, they could participate and be involved in the process. We found, unknown to the general public, most schools and public libraries have

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policies and procedures in place to determine whether any requests for reconsideration and/or removal of any book are warranted.

A few examples of what the new law (AB 1078) is designed to protect within public schools are: (1) versatility of cultures and their contributions; (2) access to any book or other resource in a school library due to their different racial backgrounds; and (3) use of sexual orientation and gender identity as a factor. The majority of school librarians interviewed have reviewed the language in AB 1078. The major consequence of this new law is to allow the state to monetarily fine school districts that actually ban books without sufficient justification. Several of the available representatives of the Solano County Public School Systems and the public library systems stated that it was appropriate to determine whether parents of students and the community at large are aware of the new anti-book-banning law. Most of the administrative departments of Solano County Libraries already have compiled a series of regulations and protocols which address the necessary steps to take when a book ban is requested. According to these representatives, not all staff have been trained regarding these procedures. Members of the community have made numerous requests over time to have a variety of public school and public library books banned. However, no books have been banned in the last five years within the public library or public school library systems. Regardless, the new regulations require schools to form a committee or panel consisting of the following representation: (1) an expert library staffer who is familiar with the particular category of the book in question; (2) administrators and/or librarians within the school system; (3) teachers; (4) community members and (5) students to comprise the determining committee. All reading materials in public libraries will be categorized for adults, youth or children.

Public libraries within Solano County already have a committee or panel process to determine whether a book meets their criteria to be banned. School libraries have a different process in place to accommodate requests from parents, students, or staff. If someone requests that the school librarian remove a book, they are given forms to complete, and these forms go to the principal. If the complainant is not satisfied with the initial written response, they may file a formal complaint.

Although AB 1078 applies only to schools, both public and school librarians stated that they are excited to follow the new law because it helps make the library a warm, welcoming space, and it fosters inclusion for all. The ALA supports equal and equitable access to all library resources and services by users of all ages. The ALA opposes all attempts to restrict access to any library services, materials, or facilities. The new law enhances the mission of public and school libraries to remain neutral and non-biased. Public school libraries must comply with AB 1078 by July 2025 or face penalties.

IV. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDING 1 – Not all public school libraries publicize policies and procedures to address how a request to ban a book is implemented.

RECOMMENDATION 1 – All public school libraries within the County update (or create) and publicize uniform policies and procedures on how to reject inappropriate book banning proposals.

FINDING 2 – Public school libraries run the risk of monetary fines if they do not comply with the new regulations by July 2025, incurring potential fiscal risk.

RECOMMENDATION 2 – All public school libraries adopt uniform policies and procedures incorporating requirements of the new law by July 2025, thereby avoiding the possibility of future fines.

FINDING 3 – Not all school library staff members have been properly trained to address the general public's interest in requests for banning, which may lead to further issues in implementing the new regulations.

RECOMMENDATION 3 – Implement appropriate training for all staff members who will need to address the issue when approached by the public.

FINDING 4 – Not all public school libraries have standing panels or committees with librarians who are qualified for each genre of books to respond to requests for banning, which could lead to inconsistent application of the new regulations.

RECOMMENDATION 4 – All public school libraries within the County establish standing panels or committees who respond to requests for banning, consisting of members familiar with library literature and knowledge of requirements of the new regulation.

COMMENTS

Since AB 1078 pertains only to public schools, most of our findings regard public school libraries. Solano County Public Libraries already follow ALA principles which state, “every single member of society deserves free, high-quality access to knowledge and culture.” Therefore, we commend them for their principles.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

- Solano County School Board (all findings 1-4)
- Solano County Board of Supervisors (all findings 1-4)
- Solano County Public School Library Directors (all findings 1-4)
- Solano County Director of Library Services (all findings 1-4)

COURTESY COPIES

- California Office of the Governor
- Solano County Office of Education

V. METHODOLOGY

Reviewed the following:

Articles and Documents:

- Board Policy Manual
- Library Policies
- Library Procedures
- Reconsideration Form
- Labeling and Rating System
- Library Bill of Rights
- Solano County Library Material Selection Policy
- The Freedom to Read Statement
- Reference & Service Association (RUSA) “Our Statement of Access”
- Access to Library Resources and Services for Minors
- Letter of Parental Responsibility (SCL 243)
- Staff Procedures for Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials
- Universal Right to Free Expression
- Request for Reconsideration of Library Material and Staff-Created Displays
- Deselected Book List from State of California [discuss later]

Websites:

Confidentiality policy: <https://solanolibrary.com/about/confidentiality-policy>

Display and exhibit policy: <https://solanolibrary.com/about/display-and-exhibit-policy>

Internet and electronic information-use-policy: <https://solanolibrary.com/about/internet-and-electronic-information-use-and-policy>

Materials selection policy: <https://solanolibrary.com/aboutmaterials-selection-policy>

<https://www.cla-net-org/>

<https://csulibguides.com/bannedbooks>

<https://www.nytimes.com/news-event/bookbans>

<https://pen.org/report/banned-in-the-usa-state-laws-suupercharge-book-suppression-in-schools>
<https://wwwgov.ca.gov/2023/09/25/california-bans-book-bans-and-textbook-censorship-in-schools>

<https://www.npr ef.2023/09/26/120180472/california-gov-newsom-barring-book-bans-raee-lgbtq>

New California law AB 1078: <https://www.npr.org/2023/09/26/1201804972>

Interviewed Staff and Reviewed Documents:

Public Library Librarians

Public School Librarians

Citizens' requests for banning or reconsideration