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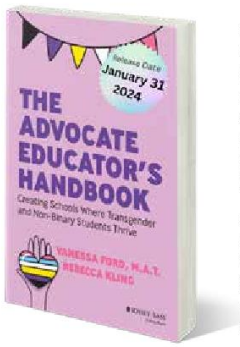
"The Advocate Educator" Is an Invaluable Guide to Supporting Trans and Nonbinary Students

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer



Transgender and nonbinary youth are facing increasing social and political attacks—which is why a new, action-oriented guide for educators and others wanting to create supportive school environments for these young people is set to be one of the most important LGBTQ-related books of the year.

Vanessa Ford and Rebecca Kling, authors of "The Advocate Educator's Handbook: Creating Schools Where Transgender and Non-Binary Students Thrive" (Jossey-Bass), spoke with me about the volume, which includes strategies and insights from their own personal and professional experiences as well as from the varied group of 52 teachers, researchers, advocates, parents, and trans and nonbinary students whom they interviewed.

Ford was a public-school classroom teacher in Washington, D.C., for 14 years, during which time one of her two children came out as transgender. She became a nationally recognized advocate for trans and nonbinary youth while continuing a career in education, and was a founding mem-

see **MOMBIAN,** *page 4*

Twilight Zone of the republic

Wishful thinking easily morphs into nightmare

by Richard J. Rosendall | rrosendall@starpower.net
contributing writer

It is premature, I think, to write America's obituary. Know-nothings and demagogues have roiled our republic before. Granted, no former president was charged with 91 felony counts prior to the Mad Marquis of Mar-a-Lago.

A pathological narcissist threatens our constitutional order with chaos by deploying what conservative columnist George F. Will calls his "feral cunning." But while Trump's MAGA fans have doubled down in support of him, they are not the majority of Americans. They can only win by confusing and demoralizing the rest of us

see **ROSENDALL,** *page 4*

Mass. Senate passes bill to repeal sodomy, anti-transgender laws

Measures now go to state House of Representatives

By Rob Salerno
Courtesy Washington Blade

The Massachusetts State Senate unanimously passed a bill Thursday to repeal several archaic criminal laws that were still on the books, including the state's sodomy law and a law critics have dubbed the "walking while trans" law. The bill now heads to the state House of Representatives, where it is expected to pass.

"I'm just really happy that it passed. And I hope that it will pass seamlessly in the house. There's absolutely no reason for it not to pass," says Tanya Neslusan, executive director of MassEquality, a leading statewide LGBTQ advocacy group.

see **ARCHAIC,** *page 3*

MA advocates, educators support bill to protect students' right to learn

Submitted by ACLU of Massachusetts

Advocates, educators, and parents are testified on January 10 in support of a legislative proposal to ensure that Massachusetts libraries can continue to offer diverse and inclusive books and materials. As a vocal minority seeks to ban books in schools and libraries nationwide, the ACLU of Massachusetts, GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD), Jewish Alliance for Law & Social Action (JALSA), MassEquality, librarians, and more call for the passage of An Act regarding free expression (S.2528/H.4229).

Sponsored by Senator Julian Cyr and Representative John Moran, S.2528/H.4229 would make clear that students' free expression rights include the right to access library materials selected by school librarians and professional educators without external political interference.

"As home to the nation's first public library and first public school, Massachusetts has long appreciated that unabridged access to knowledge is key to opportunity and fulfillment," said Senator Julian Cyr. "At this sad moment when hate and fear are driving too many cruel and bigoted policies across the nation, and yes closer to home, we must reject hateful attempts to censor the richness of the human experience captured on the shelves of our libraries. I am grateful to Representative John Moran for his partnership in ensuring no one in Massachusetts is barred from exploring books and materials. We cannot allow small-minded bans or politically opportunistic censorship interfere with the right to read."

"I am thrilled to partner with Senator Julian Cyr on this important legislation," said Representative John Moran. "As a member of the LGBTQ+

see **ACLU,** *page 7*

Pembroke schools won't ban classroom advocacy

by Bay Windows Staff

On Tuesday, January 16, the Pembroke, MA school board voted not to proceed with a school board proposal that would ban social and political advocacy items, like flags and pins. from public school classrooms.

Dozens of people protested the proposal at the school board meeting.

Silas Bell, a Pembroke High School junior, told NBC10 Boston, "I am trans and I am gay. Taking that <banners and pins> away makes schools feel unsafe, and some people already don't have accepting parents, and school's a place where they can feel accepted, and that's how it should be."

According to news reports, the proposal has been pushed by school board member Susan Bollinger. She argued that classrooms should be neutral and no group should receive extra privileges.

"And, listen, if a drag queen wants to read you a story at a library, listen to her because knowledge is power. And if someone tries to restrict your access to power, they are trying to scare you. So listen to a drag queen."

—RuPaul's acceptance speech for Outstanding Reality Competition Show for "RuPaul's Drag Race". This was the show's fifth consecutive win in this category, and RuPaul has won Outstanding Host for a Reality or Competition Program eight consecutive times.

more in Billy Masters on page 6!

Photo courtesy of MTV.

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Archaic

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Despite long being considered a leader in passing progressive legislation for LGBTQ rights, Massachusetts is one of 12 states that still have laws banning gay sex in its criminal statutes. Massachusetts General Law Chapter 272, Sections 34-35 criminalize "the abominable and detestable crime against nature" and "unnatural and lascivious acts with another person."

Both laws have been limited by a series of Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court rulings between 1974 and 2002 that held that they could not be used against people committing consensual acts in private, but the laws have never been repealed or amended to reflect that change.

Bill S.2551 passed by the Senate repeals the "crime against nature" statute entirely and limits the "unnatural and lascivious acts" statute to acts done "in public with the intent of public exposure."

It also amends Section 53, which criminalizes certain types of behaviors in public, by removing a reference to "common night walkers, common street walkers, both male and female," which some activists have said has been used to harass trans people committing no actual offence other than being out in public.

"That's something that hits the queer community. It's something easy to target when somebody is not creating a disturbance, but they are visibly queer or trans and you can label them a 'common night walker,'" Neslusan says. "It's also really stigmatizing language when you refer to somebody as a 'common night walker.'"

During debate, senators also added a provision to the bill that repeals Section 36, which makes "blasphemy" a crime punishable by up to a year in jail or a fine of $300.

Versions of the bill have been proposed several times over the years, but none has made it this far in the legislative process. The bill was introduced during last year's session, where it was studied and passed by the Joint Committee on the Judiciary and the Joint Committee on Rules. Earlier this week it was reported out of the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

In 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down all remaining state sodomy laws as unconstitutional, but they also remain on the books in Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Texas. Maryland and Minnesota repealed their sodomy laws last year. A bill to partially repeal Michigan's sodomy law has been proposed by state Democrats.

There has been a push to repeal sodomy laws and enshrine LGBTQ rights in legislation since the Supreme Court's 2022 Dobbs decision, which overturned the right to seek an abortion. In a concurring opinion, Justice Clarence Thomas argued the court should also overturn previous decisions decriminalizing sodomy and legalizing same-sex marriage.

"With the Dobbs decision, all of those privacy decisions came into question," Neslusan says.

Although Democrats hold a commanding 135-24 majority in the state House, MassEquality says it cannot take for granted that the bill will pass, especially since the state has failed to pass previous iterations of the bill in the past.

"I would hope that it will go through without any challenge. I would like to think that's the world in which we live. But I'm not going to take it for granted that we're going to have a unanimous vote to move forward for that," Neslusan says.

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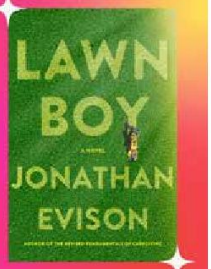
The History Project

Virtual Book Club
Lawn Boy
by Jonathan Evison

Thursday 2/1 | 7pm EST | Zoom



Join The History Project's virtual book club for an informal group discussion of Lawn Boy by Jonathan Evison.

Kick off your 2024 reading and join The History Project's Banned Book Club for an informal group discussion of Lawn Boy by Jonathan Evison.

Save the date and start reading!

This event is free and open to the public, and is part of our 2024 series of Book Club discussions dedicated to reading LGBTQ+ books that have been banned.

RSVP on Eventbrite, link to the Zoom will be sent out the day of the event. Email info@historyproject.org with any questions. For security purposes, Zoom meetings require an authenticated Zoom account, so please be sure to register with Zoom prior to the event.

Any (optional) donations made support The History Project's mission to document, preserve, and share LGBTQ history. Thank you for your support!

Where can I get a copy of Lawn Boy?

- Purchase from the independent bookstore of your choice
- Borrow from Boston Public Library
- Borrow from Minuteman Library Network
- If your primary residence is in Massachusetts, you may be eligible for a Boston Public Library (BPL) eCard. If you live outside of Massachusetts, check your local library system.

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Mombian

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ber of HRC's Parents for Transgender Equality Council. She and her husband JR also co-authored "Calvin," a Lambda Literary Award-winning picture book about a trans boy.

Kling, a trans woman, is now co-owner of the social impact consulting firm Better World Collaborative. Her background is in theater and performance, and she has extensive experience working with middle- and high-school students in after-school theater programs and as part of the leadership team at Harbor Camps, a summer camp for trans and gender variant youth. She and Ford met in 2016 through the National Center for Transgender Equality, where Kling was the organization's community storytelling advocate (and later education director).

Their book is organized around four core principles: Educate, Affirm, Include, and Disrupt—a framework Ford developed after leading many training sessions for educators. She explained, "Educate the community; affirm through practice and policy; include through representation; and disrupt—from when you see individual bullying, all the way up to what we are calling legislative bullying. What can you do to disrupt the narrative and make change?" Each chapter is full of ideas, examples, and encouragement from people who have done this work before, and ends with two sets of questions: ones that ask readers to self-reflect, and ones that urge them to think about how to apply the chapter's learnings to specific real-world challenges.

While the book does include some basic definitions and statistics about trans and nonbinary identities for those less familiar with them, Kling said, she and Ford primarily wanted to focus on "pragmatic and practical steps that get things moving" rather than simply on memorizing dictionary terms. She stressed, too, that "a big throughline is advocating with trans communities, not necessarily just for"—although the book also looks thoughtfully at when and how adults should bring trans young people into this work, versus when they should shield them and advocate on their behalf.

The book also places a strong emphasis on intersectionality, for as Ford observed, "Our students are coming to us with multitudes." The authors therefore look closely at the interplay of students' trans or nonbinary identities with race and racism, physical disabilities, neurodiversity, family structure and dynamics, and economic class.

Despite its wealth of strategies and examples, the book nevertheless argues that educators already have many of the tools they need. With trans and nonbinary students, Kling said, "it seems like adults forget all of the things they know" about handling bullying, talking respectfully about diverse communities, and incorporating different identities into lesson plans. In reality, however, "These are all things that educators are already being tasked with." While the specific needs of each population may vary, she said, the core philosophy of "Get to know your students and support them where they are" isn't different.

Ford added that this is a central part of becoming a board-certified teacher—as she learned from Peggy Brookins, president and CEO of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, who wrote the book's forward. Supporting trans students, therefore, "is already embedded into what makes a good teacher. We're asking educators to build on that, not to throw it out the window."

In places with anti-trans legislation, like Florida and Texas, however, Kling admits, "It's hard." Some people they interviewed said, "Educators need to keep themselves safe and employed, so you only push as hard as you can"; conversely, others asserted, "You put yourself at risk because that's what we do as teachers. We take care of our students."

At the individual level, Kling said, "I don't know that there's a one-size-fits-all answer." Still, she advised, even in challenging locations, everyone "can still make clear that humanity is diverse, that we need to respect that diversity, and that bullying and teasing is not going to be acceptable regardless of who the target is. I know that it's not that simple, but I do think on some level people make it more complicated than it needs to be."

"We also say 'Do not go it alone,' especially in those places," Ford said. "There are local, regional, and national organizations who are looking to support the work." Many are listed in the book's appendices, along with model policies, assessments, curricular and professional development resources, and more.

While many educators and parents may at first feel like trans advocacy is "totally uncharted territory," Kling continued, "Trans and nonbinary students are far from the first population who's had to fight to get a good education." We can learn from those other populations, she said, while showing allyship to them in turn.

Ford also stressed that readers shouldn't feel the need to do "everything," explaining, "We need the work happening at all levels: a parent and a student who are working with an individual classroom to make it safe, all the way up to leaders of organizations who are doing this systemically."

No matter how readers are seeking to make things better for trans and nonbinary students, or where they are in their journeys, "The Advocate Educator's Handbook" will be an invaluable guide. Learn more at theadvocateeducator.com.

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a two-time GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory, plus a searchable database of 1,400+ LGBTQ family books.

Rosendall

Continued from page 1

with a flood of disinformation.

There is also the problem of progressives who defeat themselves with all-or-nothing demands. A person named Jenna on the X social media platform wrote, "When Biden loses in November, I'm going to relish your tears." Someone named Jeffdc5 replied, "Leftie or MAGA?" By all signs, Jenna is a pro-Palestine leftie; but the question of who she is actually helping is a good one.

A Jewish friend and I were discussing the Israel-Hamas conflict. I said that my position is grounded in opposing the murder of Palestinian children as much as that of Israeli children. Rather than heroes and villains, I see terrorists on one side and an embattled politician seeking to thwart democracy on the other. In short, I do nuance. She advised me not to talk to Jews about nuance after Hamas's murderous attack on October 7.

Nuance, however, is vital to the honest resolution of differences. I will no more abandon nuance than my friend will abandon her Zionism. Without nuance, we merely toss slogans at one another.

It may be convenient to reduce complex matters to something easily chanted in the street, like "Palestine will be free! From the river to the sea!" But that makes it neither realistic nor just.

Some pro-Palestine advocates are calling President Biden "Genocide Joe" for his support for Israel. I too criticize the Israeli Defense Force's brutal assault on Gaza for its devastating impact on non-combatants. But IDF's invasion was in response to the October 7 terrorist attack, which Hamas vows to repeat.

Piling on more war crimes is no way out of a conflict. As for Israel's determination to eliminate Hamas, the death and destruction caused by IDF in Gaza serve more as an effective recruitment effort for Hamas.

I oppose Israel's illegal annexation and dispossession in the West Bank. I support a two-state solution, which Prime Minister Netanyahu has rejected. There can be no peace until people on both sides recognize one another's humanity. That seems a distant prospect.

CUNY professor Marc Lamont Hill, who was fired as a CNN contributor in 2018 after remarks before the United Nations that included the highly charged "free Palestine from the river to the sea" (widely understood to mean the elimination of Israel), recently gave impassioned remarks from a church pulpit demanding a ceasefire and accusing Biden of genocide.

It was a fine, thunderous rant, but Professor Hill essentially demands a one-sided ceasefire. Another word for that is a massacre. If you only recognize the casualties and legitimate aspirations of one side, you are seeking vengeance, not justice.

Which brings me back to the need for nuance. My Jewish friend's understandable outrage at the October 7 atrocities does not make a real, durable solution any simpler. At the same time, the threat by pro-Palestinian activists to withhold their votes in retaliation against Biden is like taking bleach to avoid Covid.

The Founding Fathers, faced with the competing factions of their day, established a governmental structure that requires compromise. To reject any compromise as a betrayal makes it impossible to govern. Demonizing imperfect Democrats only helps Republicans in thrall to a third-rate dictator.

Dogmatism blinds us to opportunities as well as consequences.

The democratic process, both in court and in Congress, has yielded great gains for the LGBTQ+ community. If we sit out the election, whether from overconfidence or dissatisfaction, we could reap the whirlwind.

Jeffdc5 on X wrote, "No one has ever truly explained this to me. We withhold our votes and then what?"

I replied, "The revolution comes and paradise breaks out. Then it dawns on you, like a twist at the end of a Twilight Zone episode, that you're trapped in a nightmare."

We are in an age of comforting narratives, truth be damned. Personally, I prefer wrestling with reality. But choose a soothing fantasy if you must. Just hope you don't wake up on a cold winter's night with the monster under the bed asleep beside you.

Richard J. Rosendall is a writer and activist at rrosendall@me.com.

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We will hold our first informational meetings on Saturday, January 13, 2024 at 10:00 AM at Fenway Health, located at 1340 Boylston St, Boston, MA 02215. Join virtually, too, through the following link: https://bit.ly/476nGbx

We will hold a second informational meeting on Saturday, January 20, 2024 at 10:00 AM at Hyde Park Branch of the Boston Public Library, located at, 35 Harvard Ave, Hyde Park, MA 02136. Join virtually, too, through the following link: https://bit.ly/4anWOH3

IN-PERSON APPLICATION DISTRIBUTION WILL TAKE PLACE:

- Thursday, January 11, 2024, 3:00 PM – 7:00 PM at Hyde Park Branch of the Boston Public Library, 35 Harvard Ave, Hyde Park, MA 02136
- Saturday, January 13, 2024, 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM at Fenway Health, 1340 Boylston St, Boston, MA 02215
- Saturday, January 20, 2024, 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM at Hyde Park Branch of the Boston Public Library, 35 Harvard Ave, Hyde Park, MA 02136
- Thursday, January 25, 2024, 3:00 PM – 7:00 PM at Hyde Square Task Force, 30 Sunnyside Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
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billy masters

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The awards season got even more cluttered than usual with the 75th Emmy Awards. What a marvelous ceremony it was. Admittedly, it would not take much to look good days after such a lackluster Golden Globes. It's a curious thing—when the show goes badly, everyone blames the host; when the show goes well, everyone gets credit except the host. As far as I was concerned, **Anthony Anderson** kept things moving and stayed out of the way. With the show all-but-stolen by his mother, someone should have thought about bringing out Anthony's TV mama, **Jenifer Lewis**. Still, I'm sorry I skipped going. Alas, most people skipped tuning in altogether. The 2022 Emmys had been the lowest-rated ceremony in history...until now. This show was 27% below that. Ouch!

The most pleasant surprise of the night was the appearance of **Dame Joan Collins**, who showed everyone how it's done. I must confess, I braced myself for a "Gladiator" moment. But if this turns out to be the last major public appearance by the 90-year-old Collins, she went out on a grand scale. She looked great and entered to a standing ovation. But I'd bet dimes to donuts she has no idea what "Beef" is. I'm just glad she didn't exclaim "La La Land"!

Who decided **David Furnish** should be seated in the back of the auditorium? Even I've had better seats at the Emmys! Of course, he's now sleeping with an EGOT. We also learned that more people have apparently seen a ghost than know a transgender person. But how many of them have seen a transgender ghost?

I really enjoyed the reunions, but got many e-mails from people wondering where the people missing from "Cheers" were. I can tell you that **Woody Harrelson** is doing a play in London. And I believe **Shelley Long** couldn't find anyone to take her shift at Target! But, fear not—Long could have an acting gig on the horizon. On the red carpet, **Kelsey Grammer** said that he could see Shelley guest starring on an episode of the "Frasier" reboot.

Once again, the speech of the night came courtesy of **Jennifer Coolidge**, who went out of her way to thank "all the evil gays". On behalf of my people—you're welcome! I dunno what's more tragic—that Tanya met her demise on "The White Lotus", or that we'll be without Coolidge in future awards seasons. Someone better write her a juicy role—stat! At least she has a film to look forward to. It was just announced that Jennifer will join **Jason Momoa** in "Minecraft"...presumably as his love interest.

Casting for the next season of "The White Lotus" is trickling out of Thailand. **Natasha Rothwell** returns to the role of Belinda, the spa manager who Jennifer Coolidge was going to finance in the first season. If she's staying at the resort as a guest, I guess we know who got Tanya's money. If she's working at the spa, oh well. Aside from **Parker Posey**, I was curious to see **Patrick Schwarzenegger** pop up. Well, his name at least.

Another "White Lotus" alum is back in the news. **Lukas Gage**—who is spreading those 15 minutes further than his butt cheeks—has joined the dating app Hinge. He says he is looking for "real love". I don't doubt Gage is looking for something, but I doubt "real love" is in his top ten. But I bet he'd like ten tops!

Elsewhere on HBO...er, Max...we have some news about "And Just Like That...". It'll be a while till we see season three. With **Sarah Jessica Parker** and hubby **Matthew Broderick** appearing in the West End production of "Plaza Suite", she's not available for winter filming. Between her stage gig and the delay caused by two strikes, the network is saying we won't get any new episodes until the 2024-25 season. When the show returns, we won't see a familiar face. Although Che has been a main character since the series debuted, we hear they will not be back. **Sara Ramirez** claims that this is due to being a vocal supporter of Palestine. However, I have yet to run into a single person who has had a positive opinion about the character. One industry insider said, "Sara needs to accept that this is not 'Grey's Anatomy', and her character was not a pivotal part of the storyline." Someone else added, "Sara was fired because Che brought nothing to the show anymore." I take issue with the word "anymore".

Joel Kim Booster was at the Emmys because "Fire Island" was up for two awards (Outstanding Television Movie and Outstanding Writing). And he was able to share some news—his next film, "Again Again Again", will be produced by Searchlight Pictures, the same people who backed "Fire Island". One person on the red carpet asked if there was anything "too rowdy or naughty to make it into the film". His answer surprised some people. "Fans will be outraged to find out that sex scenes between myself and **Zane Phillips** had to be cut for time... and other reasons. But, yeah, they missed a shot of my ass. You know? Justice for my ass."

While we haven't come across that "Fire Island" footage, we have seen Joel's ass. In his comedy special "Psychosexual", Booster revealed that he had taken several nude shots which have found their way online. "Obviously I was angry. I felt violated. But then I found out they were put on a website for male celebrity nudes. And I was like, 'They can stay.'" And, obviously you can find them on BillyMasters.com. You're welcome, Joel!

Our "Ask Billy" question asks for an update of a story. Harry in Providence says, *"I remember you saying **Pauly Shore** wanted to make a movie about **Richard Simmons**. I just saw a trailer for it. How did he get it done so fast?"*

You actually didn't see a trailer for "it". The sometime comedian allegedly had a deal with The Wolper Organization to do a feature-length biopic about the exercise guru. Then things took a strange turn. "We got another random email from this director named **Jake Lewis** who did the **Robin Williams** short and he said he wants to do a Richard Simmons short, not knowing that I had a deal with this production company already." Shore read the script and loved it. A deal was made and it was shot quickly. And then, a wrinkle—Simmons came out of seclusion to make a statement: "Hi Everybody! You may have heard they may be doing a movie about me with Pauly Shore. I have never given my permission for this movie. So don't believe everything you read. I no longer have a manager, and I no longer have a publicist. I just try to live a quiet life and be peaceful. Thank you for all your love and support." Whatever you may think about Pauly's acting ability, I think we can all agree on one thing—someone better get that awful wig back to whatever tour of "Annie" they stole it from! "The Court Jester" premiered last week in Park City during the Sundance Film Festival and depicts Simmons' 2004 appearance on "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" (and wait till you see their "Ellen"). You can watch it on BillyMasters.com.

When there are battling Richard Simmons projects—both starring Pauly Shore—it's definitely time to end yet another column. As we went to press, we heard of the sudden passing of Olympic pole vaulter Shawn Barber. The openly gay athlete was 29 and suffered what has been called "medical complications". There's nothing particularly complicated about www.BillyMasters.com, the site that surely doesn't need Richard Simmons' permission (but we do know he's a fan). If you have a question, send it along to me at Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before Dame Joan Collins is hired to revive those "Where's the beef?" commercials for Wendy's! So, until next time, remember, one man's filth is another man's bible.

Photo by Thibault, via Wikimedia Commons.

Jennifer Coolidge

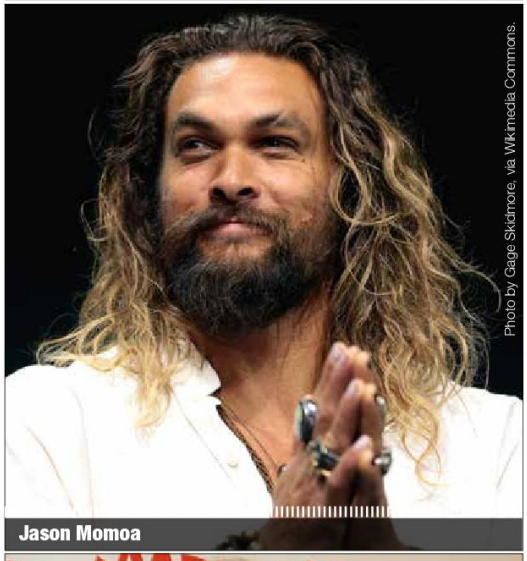


Photo by Gage Skidmore, via Wikimedia Commons.

Jason Momoa

Photo by Angela George, via Wikimedia Commons.

Richard Simmons

ACLU

Continued from page 1

community representing a highly diverse district, I understand how important it is to prevent unnecessary censorship of books and other library resources. This bill would help ensure access to age-appropriate materials for communities across the state, with content decision making maintained by trained professionals."

From calls for book bans to curriculum censorship, advocates have decried a coordinated, nationwide attack on students' right to learn, noting that Massachusetts is not immune. In December, police in Great Barrington searched a middle school classroom in response to an anonymous complaint about a book, prompting a letter from the ACLU and GLAD. Both organizations previously urged school districts to protect students' legal rights by rejecting calls to remove library books.

"Politically motivated censorship has no place in our Commonwealth," said Carol Rose, Executive Director at the ACLU of Massachusetts. "Students have a right not just to express themselves, but to learn from a diverse range of materials — including library books by and about LGBTQ and BIPOC communities. We commend librarians and school officials for rejecting these censorship campaigns and we thank Senator Julian Cyr and Representative John Moran for their leadership on this issue."

"Libraries with books and characters that portray the range of people in the school community help students to both see themselves and learn about others. Students' abilities to navigate the world improve when there is a culture of respect, openness, and tolerance — when that is denied, students miss out and learning suffers," said Mary Bonauto, Senior Director of Civil Rights and Legal Strategies at GLAD. "We're grateful to the librarians, school officials, parents, and community members who have stood strong against restrictions on learning and politicized efforts to ban books centered on people of color and LGBTQ+ people, and we thank Senator Cyr and Representative Moran for introducing this legislation to say we will not let this happen in Massachusetts."

"Personally, I am horrified that today, in 2024, I have to be testifying in front of a state legislative committee in the United States of America in defense of the right of people to read books," said Cindy Rowe, President and CEO of JALSA. "Book bans are tactics designed to control what ideas people can be exposed to, warping our perception of the world around us. Further, book bans are attempts to control our understanding of history in order to whitewash it. Efforts to combat book banning, like this legislation, are how we stand up to authoritarians, white nationalists, and others who would use division as a political tactic to keep us from coming together in a thriving democracy rooted in equity, empathy, and opportunity for all."

"The attempts to ban books across the Commonwealth and across our nation are attacks on marginalized communities," said Tanya Neslusan, Executive Director of MassEquality. "The inclusion of diverse reading materials in school libraries is critical for students who need to see their identities represented in these pages. It is equally important for the students who are not members of these communities to engage with this material so they can understand and learn to accept different identities. This bill will put decisions in the capable hands of professional librarians rather than those pursuing a discriminatory political agenda."

"Queer students and students from LGBTQ families should not be denied access to books in school just because someone else's parents don't approve of our families," said Arline Isaacson, Co-Chair of the Massachusetts GLBTQ Political Caucus. "How dare those parents try to deprive our children the ability to access library books about themselves or our families."

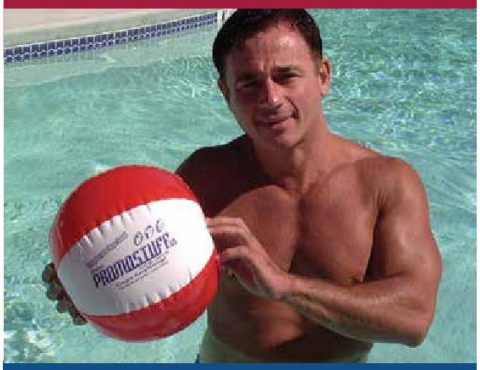
S.2528/H.4229 would ensure that decisions about book selection or removal are based on educators' professional training and not personal, partisan, or doctrinal beliefs. In addition, the bill would establish clear standards by which any book removal requests must be judged to ensure that appropriate materials are not removed.

"The current climate around intellectual freedom makes it challenging for librarians to fulfill our responsibility to our students," said Jennifer Varney of the Massachusetts School Library Association. "At best, librarians are subject to hostile questions. At worst, librarians are being vilified, harassed, and doxxed. Some are choosing to leave the profession altogether. A successful democracy relies on an educated population. Massachusetts legislators can help school librarians protect the rights of students by passing these bills, so that we can serve our students without fear of discipline, repercussions, or harassment."

"Parents have a voice in public education. A parents' right to opt their child out of curricula or library materials already exists," said Andrea Fiorillo of the Massachusetts Library Association. "However, when parents, or the activists claiming to speak on their behalf, attempt to deny access to everyone's children, whose parental rights are being served? This is not parental control; it is authoritarian control."

For more information about the ACLU of Massachusetts' Free Expression Project, go to: https://www.aclum.org/en/free-expression-project

HOT IDEAS



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