

**Authors  
Against  
Book Bans**

Rhode Island Authors Against Book Bans  
<https://riaabb.weebly.com/>

House State Government and Elections Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
Sent c/o Steven Sepe Committee Clerk  
HouseStateGovernmentandElections@rilegislature.gov

**RE: Testimony in Support of H5726 – The Freedom to Read Act**

Dear Representative Evan Shanley, Chair, and Members of the House State Government and Elections Committee:

We are writing on behalf of the Rhode Island chapter of Authors Against Book Bans, a national coalition of writers, illustrators, anthology editors and contributors, and other book creators, united in support of freedom of expression and the freedom to read, to express strong support for H5726, the Freedom to Read Act.

Censorship directly harms book creators. Book challenges, soft censorship, and outright bans take an emotional and creative toll on creators. They also detrimentally impact our earnings by limiting our ability to sell our work in a free marketplace.

The Freedom to Read Act will position Rhode Island as a safe harbor for books and book creators. Rhode Island's creative economy employs over 18,000 people, and adds both financial and cultural value to the state. This bill guards our freedom to continue creating as well as consuming art and literature.

Thank you for considering our testimony in support of H5726. We have attached statistics and data that illustrate the increase in censorship nationally and the impact of censorship on Rhode Island. We urge the committee to pass this important legislation to protect the vital role of book creators in our state.

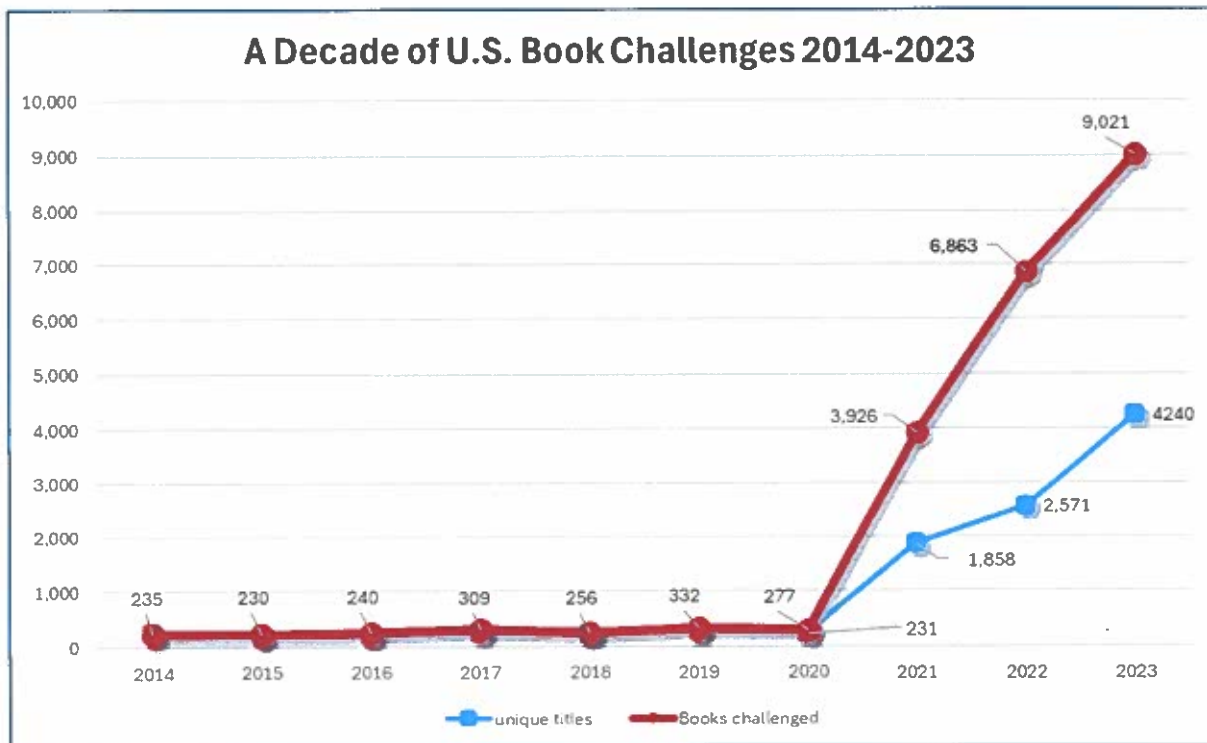
Sincerely,

Padma Venkatraman  
Jeanette Bradley  
Rhode Island Authors Against Book Bans

## Authors Against Book Bans

**Censorship is rising nationally, fueled by small groups of people challenging long lists of books.**

Nationally, book challenges and bans have grown exponentially in the last five years. Since 2020, book challenges have shifted from individuals bringing a challenge against one book to small groups of people trying to ban lists of books.



Source: American Library Association Source: <https://www.ala.org/bbooks/censorship-numbers>

A 2023 analysis of book challenges nationwide by *The Washington Post* found:

- 42% of the books were challenged for having LGBTQ2+ (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-Spirit) characters or themes.
- 28% of the books were challenged for having BIPOC Black, Indigenous, person of color) characters or dealing with racism.
- **60% of book challenges were filed by the same 11 people.**

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/05/23/lgbtq-book-ban-challengers/>

## Censorship impacts Rhode Island readers and creators.

- 35 books were challenged in Rhode Island from 2020-24.
- Most Rhode Island challenges were at the school district or school level. Some were in public libraries. Each challenge takes time and resources away from the ability of schools and libraries to serve their students and patrons.
- 15 books by 11 Rhode Island authors and illustrators have been banned, challenged, or soft censored in the last five years.
- These books ranged in reading level from picture books through young adult. 10 are fiction, 5 are non-fiction.
- Most censorship is “soft” or “quiet” censorship and is not reported in statistics or lists of banned books. These lists are only the visible tip of the iceberg.

### Rhode Island Censorship Data

The following pages contain two lists of books:

**Books by Rhode Island creators that have been challenged, banned, or soft censored in the last five years:** This is our best information on challenges that have been made to books authored or illustrated by creators who are resident members of Rhode Island’s creative economy. These data were collected from PEN America and American Library Association (ALA) datasets, internet searches for news stories on book challenges, and a survey of Rhode Island authors conducted by RI Authors Against Book Bans.

**Books Censored or Challenged in Rhode Island 2020 - 2024:** This list contains the 35 books that had challenges brought against them in the state of Rhode Island from 2020-2024. It includes anonymized data points from ALA for which we do not have challenge dates, so we have only included books from their list that were published in 2020 or later. The PEN America dataset starts in 2021.



To the best of our knowledge, 34 of these challenged books were later returned to shelves. Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* was removed from the school in Pawtucket.

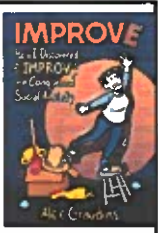



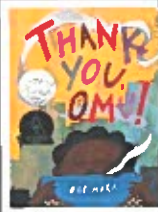


About ALA OIF data: <https://www.ala.org/bbooks/book-ban-data>

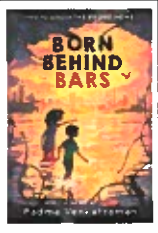

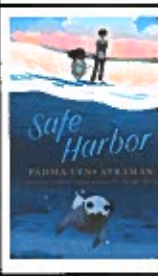
About PEN America data: <https://pen.org/banned-books-list-2025/>

## Books by Rhode Island creators that have been challenged, banned, or soft censored\* in the last five years

\*Soft censorship, also known as quiet censorship or self-censorship, is when a book is purposefully limited, restricted, removed, or never purchased, although it would serve the community.

Creator Name	Title	Book Type	Details on challenge/censorship	Cover Image
Damian Alexander	Other Boys	Graphic Novel Memoir	Challenged in GA, VA, IL, and OR. Access restricted to older age than publisher guidelines, in Oconee County Library, GA.	
Jeanette Bradley	Something Great	Fiction Picture Book	Challenged in NE. Soft censorship* elsewhere.	
Tina Cane	Alma Presses Play	Young Adult Fiction	A target of known soft censorship.*	
Anika Aldamuy Denise	Planting Stories	Nonfiction Picture Book	Censored in Northampton, PA Area School District.	
Anika Aldamuy Denise	Phenomenal AOC	Nonfiction Picture Book	A target of known soft censorship.	





Alex Graudins	Improve: How I Discovered Improv and Conquered Social Anxiety	Graphic Novel Memoir	Challenged in Texas	
Meg Hunt	Bunk 9's Guide to Growing Up	Illustrated Middle Grade nonfiction	Challenged in NY and PA	
Cathy G Johnson	The Breakaways	Graphic Novel Fiction	Has been removed from shelves or has been restricted to age groups older than those its publisher and librarian reviewers recommend, in at least 48 school districts in multiple states.	
Oge Mora	Saturday	Fiction Picture Book	Pulled off shelves in Central York, PA schools in 2021 by the school administration. It was later returned.	
Oge Mora	Thank You, Omu	Fiction Picture Book	Challenged in ID. Pulled off shelves in Central York, PA schools in 2021 by the school administration. It was later returned.	
Riss Neilson	Deep in Providence	Fiction Young Adult	Challenged in IL.	
John Rocco	Percy Jackson's Greek Gods	Illustrated Middle Grade	Challenged and removed from shelves in Clay County District Schools in Green Cove Springs, FL.	

Padma Venkatraman	Born Behind Bars	Fiction Middle Grade	Challenged and removed from Pinellas County, FL schools before being returned to shelves. Also challenged in TX.	
Padma Venkatraman	The Bridge Home	Fiction Middle Grade	Challenged in a private school in Massachusetts. It was retained.	
Padma Venkatraman	Safe Harbor	Fiction Middle Grade	A known target of soft censorship	

These data were collected from PEN America and American Library Association (ALA) datasets, internet searches for news stories on book challenges, and a survey of Rhode Island authors conducted by RI Authors Against Book Bans.

## Books Censored or Challenged in Rhode Island 2020 - 2024



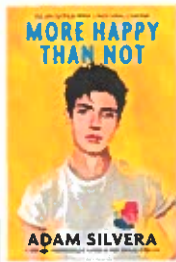


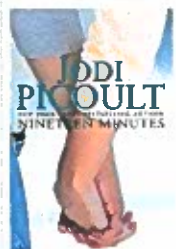
This list contains the 35 books that have had challenges (censorship attempts) brought against them in the state of Rhode Island from 2020-2024. The list is sorted by year.







Source	Cover	Author	Title	Book category	Year	Location
ALA OIF Documented challenges		Geisler, Dagner	My Body is Growing	Nonfiction picture book	2020 published, challenge date unknown	Anonymous
ALA OIF Documented challenges		Ogden, Charles	Identity & Gender	Middle grade nonfiction	2020 published, challenge date unknown	Anonymous
PEN America database		Bechdel, Alison	Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic	Adult graphic novel memoir	2021	Pawtucket School Department
PEN America database		Kobabe, Maia	Gender Queer: A Memoir	New adult graphic novel memoir	2021	Westerly and North Kingstown Public Schools


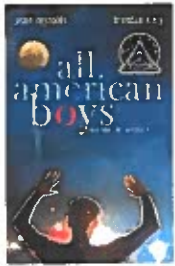




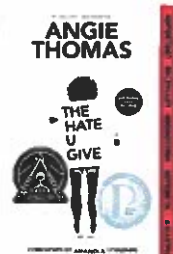
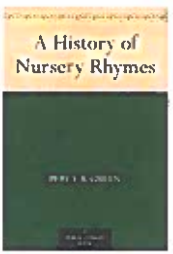

ALA OIF Documented challenges		Daeson, Juno	This Book is Gay	Young adult nonfiction	2021 published, challenge date unknown	Anonymous
ALA OIF Documented challenges		Sanders, Rob	Two Grooms on a Cake	Nonfiction picture book	2021 published, challenge date unknown	
Local News		Elliot, Zetta	A Place Inside of Me: A Poem to Heal the Heart	Poetry picture book	2022	Smithfield School District
Local News		Morrison, Toni	Beloved	Adult fiction, Pulitzer Prize	2022	North Smithfield School District
Local News		Telgemeier, Raina	Drama	Middle grade fiction graphic novel	2022	North Smithfield School District
Local News		Foer, Jonathan Safran	Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close	Young adult fiction	2022	North Smithfield School District



Local News		Bryant, Jen; Cannaday Chapman	Feed Your Mind: A Story of August Wilson	Nonfiction picture book	2022	Smithfield School District
Local News		Lai, Remy	Fly on the Wall	Middle grade fiction graphic novel	2022	North Smithfield School District
Local News		Silvera, Adam	More Happy Than Not	Young adult fiction	2022	North Smithfield School District
Local News		Robinson, Lisa	Were I Not a Girl: The Inspiring and True Story of Dr. James Barry		2022	Smithfield School District
PEN America database		Peters, Julie Anne	By the Time You Read This, I'll Be Dead	Young adult fiction	2022	North Smithfield School District
PEN America database		Picoult, Jodi	Nineteen Minutes	Adult fiction	2022	North Smithfield School District

PEN America database		McCafferty, Megan	Sloppy Firsts (Jessica Darling Series)	Middle grade fiction	2022	North Smithfield School District
PEN America database		Alexie, Sherman	The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian	Young adult fiction	2022	North Smithfield School District
PEN America database		Mathieu, Jennifer	The Truth About Alice	Young adult fiction	2022	North Smithfield School District
PEN America database		Asher, Jay	Thirteen Reasons Why	Young adult fiction	2022	North Smithfield School District
PEN America database		Tamaki, Mariko	This One Summer	Young adult fiction graphic novel	2022	North Smithfield School District
PEN America database		Hopkins, Ellen	Tricks	Young adult fiction	2022	North Smithfield School District

PEN America database		Levithan, David	Two Boys Kissing	Young adult fiction	2022	North Smithfield School District
ALA OIF Documented challenges		Malone, C.K.	A Costume for Charly	Fiction picture book	2022 published, challenge date unknown	Anonymous
RILA School Library Survey		Aubre Andrus	Bloody Mary: Ghost of a Queen?	Middle grade nonfiction	2023	Anonymous school
RILA School Library Survey		Craig Thompson	Blankets	Adult graphic novel memoir	2023	Anonymous school
RILA School Library Survey		Reynolds, Jason	All-American Boys	Young adult fiction	2023/24 school year	Anonymous school
RILA School Library Survey		Mass, Wendy; Rebecca Stead	Bob	Middle grade fiction	2023/24 school year	Anonymous school

RILA School Library Survey		Hoose, Phillip	Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice	Young adult nonfiction	2023/24 school year	Anonymous school
RILA School Library Survey		Reynolds, Jason	Stamped	Young adult nonfiction	2023/24 school year	Anonymous school
RILA School Library Survey		Thomas, Angie	The Hate You Give	Young adult fiction	2023/24 school year	Anonymous school
RILA School Library Survey		Percy B. Green	History of Nursery Rhymes	Adult nonfiction	2023/24 school year	anonymous public library
RILA School Library Survey		Kwame Alexander	Rebound	Middle grade fiction	2023/24 school year	Anonymous school