

House Bill Testimony

Freedom to Read ~~Public Comment~~ Speech:

Bio:

Hello, my name is Sila Yang (pronounced as "Sheila"). I go by she/her pronouns and I'm a senior from Pilgrim High School. I am a Youth Organizer at ARISE and have been part of the organization for the last 4 years. I'm here to testify on behalf of HB 5726.

Speech:

Back in my sophomore year, I had to read a book called *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, a novel taking place in a dystopian future where books are outlawed and burned to ashes by firemen. The story's themes explore the effects of censorship and conformity, an individual's struggle for self-identity and a desire for knowledge. However, the government brainwashes its citizens with the media, preventing them from learning and being open-minded. And when I look at Trump's Administration, I ask myself, "Hmm, where have I heard this all before?"

Censorship is a global issue, even the freest of countries aren't safe by it. Despite being considered "the land of the free", we are threatened with censorship. According to the *National Coalition Against Censorship*, "censorship prevents people from spreading ideas, opinions, and important messages." And in the year 2025, Trump's administration threatens to ban books relating to LGBTQ+ issues, racial history, and in/justice. Not only does censorship affect writers and librarians, but it threatens the education of many students and silences marginalized communities with myself included. As a Hmong American student, I understand what it feels like to be hidden in the dark. The Vietnam War, let alone the Secret War of Laos, is rarely, if ever discussed in history classes. And to have other history banned: LGBTQ+ history, black history—to have any history censored is a disgrace to history itself!

Back when I was an elementary schooler, my second grade teacher read books about Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. I'd listen to the segregation of black and white students, I'd listen to the arrest of Rosa Parks for simply sitting in a bus, and I remember listening to an excerpt of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech. And I remember that following night, a tear swept from my eyes and my heart filled with gratitude. I was in second grade, and yet I was inspired by these impactful figures to make a difference. I, too, wanted to live where everyone is created equal, where everyone is treated equal. Which is why I am here today.

Is this what America threatens to take away from our youth? Inspiration? Role models? It is a shame to live on land where we're supposedly "free", yet our government wants to restrict a child's freedom to knowledge and kindness.

Once again, I ask that you all continue to support the *Freedom to Read* coalition and Senate Bill 0238, for our writers, for our librarians, for our students, and for our future. Thank you for your time.