

Proposed letter to the editor or op-ed from the Madison Public Library Board:

Madison loves its public libraries in all their forms. Madisonians enjoy access to nine — soon to be ten! - branches of the Madison Public Library, as well as research libraries at UW Madison, and our kids spend many happy hours in their public-school libraries. As members of the Board of Directors of the Madison Public Library, we keep an eye on laws that could help or hurt our beloved libraries. In fact, our Bylaws require us to “study and support legislation that is in the interest of library users.” In that spirit, we write to alert our neighbors of the good, the bad, and the ugly in pending legislation regarding school libraries:

First, the federal **Right to Read Act** (introduced as H.R. 6440 in 2025) seeks to support libraries and learning, and limit censorship, by ensuring states and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) receiving federal funds protect students’ First Amendment rights in school libraries. This bill would be a powerful defense against the frightening rise of book bans around the country.

Key provisions of the Right to Read Act include:

- **Liability Protection:** Shields teachers, librarians, and school leaders from legal action when following state or local policies regarding the “right to read.”
- **Funding and Staffing:** Reauthorizes literacy programs and allows grants to be used for recruiting and retaining state-certified school librarians.
- **Assurances:** Requires states to confirm they provide equal protection in school library conduct compliant with the Fourteenth Amendment.

The Right to Read Act has been referred to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. Wisconsin Senator Tammy Baldwin is a member of this Committee, and we encourage library supporters to contact her, and the other members, to voice your support for this bill.

On a grimmer note, the federal **Stop the Sexualization of Children Act** (H.R. 7661, S.B. 4925) sounds unobjectionable, but in fact threatens to severely limit the information available in public schools, to the detriment of all students. The bill seeks to amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to prohibit federal funding for any program or literature provided to children under 18 that includes “sexually oriented material.” But what that means under the Act may surprise you.

Key provisions and current status include:

- **Definition of Prohibited Material:** The bill defines sexually oriented material to include any depiction, description, or simulation of sexually explicit conduct, and critically, any material involving “**gender dysphoria or transgenderism.**”
- **Exemptions:** It allows funding for standard science coursework, texts of major world religions, and “classic works” of literature and art, though these terms are defined by specific conservative-aligned lists (e.g., Smarthistory for art, Compass Classroom for literature).
- **Committee Action:** The House Committee on Education and workforce **advanced the bill** on March 17, 2026, by a vote of 18-13. The Senate referred the bill to its Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. It has not yet passed the full House or Senate.
- **Opposition:** The bill has faced strong criticism from the **American Library Association (ALA)** and the **Authors Guild**, who label it a federal book ban that targets LGBTQ+ voices and infringes on intellectual freedom and local control.

Please contact your congressional representatives immediately to support the Right to Read Act and oppose H.R. 7661. We have to oppose this threat to our young people’s access to quality resources and attempts to restrict their intellectual curiosity. And on the other hand, our representatives in Congress need to know how highly we value all libraries, and that we fully support the Right to Read Act.

Thank you in advance for your attention to these issues. We’ll see you at the library!