



## STAFF REPORT INFORMATION ONLY

### Trends in Intellectual Freedom Challenges – 2026 Annual Report

**Date:** May 26, 2026  
**To:** Toronto Public Library Board  
**From:** City Librarian

#### SUMMARY

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The purpose of this report is to provide the Toronto Public Library Board with information about recent trends in intellectual freedom challenges in North America. Intellectual freedom is a fundamental principle and core value for public libraries, which means:

- supporting and facilitating the free exchange of information and ideas in a democratic society; and
- respecting each individual's rights to privacy and choice.

Libraries have been a democratizing force in the modern world. Democracy is preserved by making available the widest possible range of viewpoints, opinions and ideas, including those that some consider unacceptable, unconventional or unpopular, provided of course, that these expressions are not violating any laws.

In 2025, targeted intellectual freedom challenges continued their upward trend from previous years, accounting for 92% of challenges reported to the American Library Association (ALA) up from 72%. In Toronto, the number of challenges remains low, however, a growing trend is emerging across Canada that reflects a broader societal discourse, as well as the Alberta government's proposed Bill 28, both of which challenge the right to access the widest possible range of viewpoints, opinions, and ideas.

In response, TPL, along with other libraries throughout North America, have undertaken numerous initiatives to protect, defend and promote the freedom to read and freedom of expression through the breadth and diversity of collections and services, and also through advocacy and education initiatives.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There is no financial impact beyond what has already been approved in the current year's budget.

The Director, Finance & Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this financial impact statement and agrees with it.

## **ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN**

Toronto Public Library's (TPL's) continued work of providing universal access to knowledge, ideas and opinions that represent and amplify the voices of the communities it serves and meet the changing needs of Torontonians, advances TPL's strategic priority of being recognized internationally as the centre for social connection, community dialogue and strengthening democratic values.

## **EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

By defending and intentionally embedding the practice of intellectual freedom in its work, TPL continues to ensure spaces, collections, and services reach, engage and reflect equity-deserving groups and help them express and amplify their voices; and advocate for and actively break down barriers to information, information literacy and platforms for expression.

## DECISION HISTORY

At its April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2026 meeting the Library Board passed a motion opposing Alberta's Bill 28.

At its January 26, 2026 meeting the Library Board received the [Intellectual Freedom Challenges – 2025 Annual Report](#).

At its September 18, 2023 meeting the Library Board approved the revised [Community and Event Space Rental Policy](#), which includes the Intellectual Freedom Statement and incorporates the request for reconsideration process.

At its June 19, 2023 meeting the Library Board approved the [Request for Reconsideration and Administrative Updates](#) for the Programming and Library Space for Art Exhibits policies, which includes the Intellectual Freedom Statement and incorporates the request for reconsideration process.

At its January 23, 2023 meeting the Library Board approved the updated [Materials Selection Policy](#), which includes the Intellectual Freedom Statement, and an updated version of the Ontario Library Association's Statement on Intellectual Rights of the Individual.

At its December 5, 2022 meeting the Library Board approved the report [Intellectual Freedom and Equity Statements](#), as two mutually reinforcing statements that recognize TPL's role in supporting these foundational principles.

At its December 5, 2022 meeting the Library Board approved the report, [Trends in Intellectual Freedom Challenges](#), and reaffirmed its commitment to the Canadian Federation of Library Association's (CFLA) Statement on Intellectual Freedom and endorsed the Urban Library Council's Declaration of Democracy.

At its June 27, 2016 meeting the Library Board endorsed the Canadian Library Association's Statement on Intellectual Freedom and Libraries as part of its approval of the report: [Materials Selection Policy – 2016 Revisions](#).

At its June 26, 2000 meeting the Library Board endorsed the Canadian Library Association's Position Statement on Intellectual Freedom as part of its approval of the [Materials Selection Policy](#).

## ISSUE BACKGROUND

Intellectual freedom is a fundamental principle and core value for public libraries. Libraries have been a democratizing force in the modern world promoting literacy and a literate population, free and open access to a diversity of information and ideas, supporting intellectual freedom, lifelong learning, preserving the past and protecting personal privacy.

At Toronto Public Library, intellectual freedom means supporting and facilitating the free exchange of information and ideas in a democratic society and respecting each individual's right to privacy and choice. Democracy is preserved by making available the widest possible range of viewpoints, opinions and ideas, including those, which some may consider unacceptable, unconventional or unpopular, provided of course, these expressions are not violating any laws.

This trends report uses American data provided by the American Library Association (ALA) from their *State of America's Libraries: A snapshot of 2025*<sup>1</sup> report, and Canadian trends from the Centre for Free Expression's library challenges database related to intellectual freedom challenges at public libraries.

ALA has collected reports of intellectual freedom challenges from American libraries since 1967. In Canada, the Centre for Free Expression (CFE) and Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA) Intellectual Freedom Challenges Database provide a publicly accessible database including 30 years of public library challenges, the suggested resolutions, and each library's response.

TPL reports Intellectual Freedom Challenges to the Board annually, which can include venue rentals, exhibits, programs, events, and collection requests for reconsideration from customers.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ala.org/news/state-americas-libraries-report-2025>

## COMMENTS

In 2025, targeted intellectual freedom challenges continued their upward trend from previous years, accounting for 92% of challenges reported to the American Library Association up from 72%. In Toronto, the number of challenges remains low, however, a growing trend is emerging across Canada that reflects a broader societal discourse, as well as the Alberta government's proposed Bill 28, both of which challenge the right to access the widest possible range of viewpoints, opinions, and ideas.

### Challenges in the United States

Data from ALA's *State of America's Libraries: A Snapshot of 2025*<sup>2</sup> reveals a growing trend of challenges to intellectual freedom by organized groups attempting to censor library materials and services from library users:

- In 2025 4,235 unique titles were reported as challenges to ALA, 2000 more than 2024. Prior to 2020 the average number of unique titles was 273.
- 51% of these challenges happened at public libraries.
- The total number of challenges reported to ALA in 2025 was 713. 487 were for books including a total of 7,884 titles.
- 40% of titles challenged reflected the lived experience of 2SLGBTQIA+ and BIPOC people.
- 71% of challenges were reported as submitted by government agencies and 21% by groups targeting specific library materials. In the past these two groups accounted for 12% of reported challenges and an average of 46 titles.
- Parents were reported as submitting 2.7% of challenges and 1.4% of challenges came from individual library customers.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ala.org/news/state-americas-libraries-report-2025>

The annual report from ALA reinforces that libraries “need legislative frameworks that protect the freedom to read and the professional autonomy of library workers”. Legislation must be in place to protect customer privacy and ensure libraries remain nonpartisan such as that introduced in Connecticut, Delaware and Rhode Island and supported by the publishing industry.

The ALA reports that First Amendment protections related to the right to read are being applied inconsistently across the United States. In some cases, in Florida and Iowa, challenged books were allowed to remain on library shelves. However, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear cases from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas concerning First Amendment protections and restrictions on access to certain materials. These challenged works include classic literature and scientific texts. For example, *A Clockwork Orange* is listed in the attachment to this report as one of the eleven most challenged books of 2025 as identified by the ALA.

## Challenges in Canada

In 2025, the Canadian Library Challenges Database received 502 challenge reports, with 402 related to collections. 90% of challenged titles have an intended audience of youth or children.<sup>3</sup>

At TPL, five requests for reconsideration were received in 2025 as reported in its [Intellectual Freedom Challenges – 2025 Annual Report](#).

In Canada 88% of challenges are reported as presented by individuals in public libraries and 93% of challenges for school libraries were from the Alberta Government reflecting the current challenges in Alberta.

Libraries in Canada continue to face challenges on a wide range of issues, and not just to physical books and other collection materials (historically where libraries have faced the most challenges). These other challenges include programs, e-content, internet access, room bookings, decals, displays and exhibits.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://cfe.torontomu.ca/publications/rising-demands-censorship-final-report-challenges-faced-canadian-libraries-2025>

The ten most challenged titles in Canadian libraries in 2025:

1. Neil Gaiman, *The Sandman* (series)
2. Robert Kirkman, *The Walking Dead* (series)
3. Brian K. Vaughan, *The Last Man* (series)
4. (tied). Kanoko Sakurakoji, *Blackbird* (series)  
Brian K. Vaughan, *Saga* (series)
5. Alan Moore, *V for Vendetta*
6. (tied). Craig Thompson, *Blankets*  
Alan Moore, *The Watchman* (Series)
7. George Orwell, *1984: The Graphic Novel*
8. Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaids Tale - Graphic Novel*

## New legislation in Alberta

In 2025 the Government of Alberta required school libraries to remove [360 books](#) from their collections, and on May 14, 2026, received royal ascent legislation that edits The Library Act to limit the autonomy of public libraries by altering the approach to governance and operations. The [Coalition of Alberta Public Libraries](#) has launched an education campaign for the public and has called for meaningful consultation with the government. In response, at its April 20, 2026 meeting, TPL's Board passed a motion opposing Alberta's Bill 28.

The [Canadian Urban Library Council](#), [Canadian Federation of Library Associations](#), [Urban Libraries Council](#) and [Federation of Ontario Public Libraries](#) have also advocated in support of Alberta Public Library autonomy and against the new legislative changes. The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries is also proactively working to prepare for consultation with the Ontario government to ensure there is awareness of the foundational role of Intellectual Freedom in public libraries, and library operational autonomy is maintained in Ontario Public Libraries.

## Intellectual Freedom at TPL

TPL stands with other libraries to promote and defend the freedom to read and freedom of expression through the breadth and diversity of its collections and services, and also through a number of advocacy and education initiatives. In 2024, these efforts included the award winning [What's at Stake](#) advocacy campaign and programming series.

System-wide, library staff lead intellectual freedom programming and advocacy initiatives including:

### **National public streamed and live events**

- Co-sponsorship of Centre for Free Expression ([CFE](#)) programming focusing on intellectual freedom.

### **Advocacy leadership**

- At its April 20, 2026 meeting the Library Board passed a motion opposing Alberta's Bill 28, leading the way for numerous other libraries across Canada to do the same.
- Supporting other public libraries with their intellectual freedom challenges and policy development.
- Standing members on the Centre for Free Expression Intellectual Committee and Canadian Federation of Library Associations Intellectual Freedom Task Force.

### **Policy and procedures support and training**

- Supporting staff throughout the system in the implementation of the Intellectual Freedom statement, policies and guidelines related to intellectual freedom.
- Rollout of Intellectual Freedom 101, Key Concepts and Library Practices e-learning module, which is mandatory training for all 2000 staff members. To date, more than 75% of staff have completed this training.
- Facilitated responses to four Request for Reconsiderations of Library Materials.
- Creation of the Intellectual Freedom Library Policies & Procedures in Action presentation and accompanying e-learning module. Presented to all levels of staff at Branch Heads, Public Service Managers and in-person meetings with staff.
- Creation of internal intellectual freedom resources and a request for reconsideration procedures page.

## **Presentations**

- Freedom to Read Week presentations focused on Intellectual Freedom for various external organizations.
- Presentation of the Book Sanctuary at BiblioCon.
- Facilitated a discussion on intellectual freedom at the Canadian Public Libraries Collection Leaders pre-conference at the Ontario Library Association conference.
- OLA virtual panel 'Gimme Shelter, Book Sanctuaries in Public Libraries', discussing TPL's approach to the Book Sanctuary Collection to attendees across Canada.

## **Programs, parades and displays**

- TPL Pride Parade presence featuring the theme of intellectual freedom.
- TPL's ongoing [Civil Society programming](#) focused on intellectual freedom in the face of war, legal harassment, misinformation and censorship.
- Ongoing promotion and updating of TPL's Book Sanctuary collection.

## **CONCLUSION**

Increases in targeted intellectual freedom challenges, conversations and protests throughout North America have continued in 2025 and 2026. Efforts to challenge and censor content takes many forms, and requests have targeted books, programs and other events. Libraries and their allies are standing up and speaking out to protect intellectual freedom and ensure the voices of marginalized and equity-deserving communities are not shut down, and access to materials is not limited by challenges or legislation.

TPL's core value of intellectual freedom guarantees and facilitates the free exchange of information and ideas in a democratic society, protecting intellectual freedom and respecting individuals' rights to privacy and choice. TPL is committed to being a vital democratic institution that advocates and provides a platform for intellectual freedom and freedom of expression, as well as space for discussion, debate and civic engagement.

TPL facilitates and defends access to information to ensure everyone has equal and unfettered access to information in all its forms. The library will continue to take a leadership role in protecting and defending intellectual freedom.

Discussion, debate and civic engagement are supported by collections, programs, spaces and services that reflect the reality and experiences of community members.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Moe Hosseini-Ara  
City Librarian

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1: 2025 Top 11 Challenged Titles from ALA

# TOP 11 MOST CHALLENGED BOOKS OF 2025

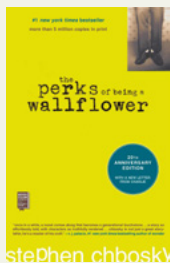
The American Library Association documented **487 attempts to censor** books at libraries, schools, and universities in 2025. The reasons most commonly cited for censorship were false claims of illegal obscenity for minors; inclusion of LGBTQIA+ representation; covering topics of race, racism, social justice, and diversity; and presenting political or religious views with which the challengers disagreed. Of the **4,235 unique titles** that were challenged or banned in 2025, here are the top 11 most frequently targeted.

1



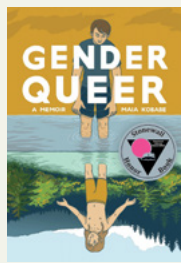
**SOLD**  
by Patricia McCormick  
Why this book matters:  
[bit.ly/soldBR](https://bit.ly/soldBR)

2



**THE PERKS OF BEING A WALLFLOWER**  
by Stephen Chbosky  
Why this book matters:  
[bit.ly/wallflowerBR](https://bit.ly/wallflowerBR)

3



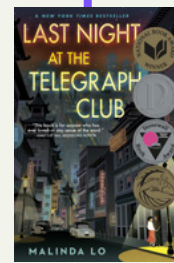
**GENDER QUEER: A MEMOIR**  
by Maia Kobabe  
Why this book matters:  
[bit.ly/genderBR](https://bit.ly/genderBR)

4



**EMPIRE OF STORMS**  
by Sarah J. Maas  
Why this book matters:  
[bit.ly/empireofstormsBR](https://bit.ly/empireofstormsBR)

5  
(TIE)

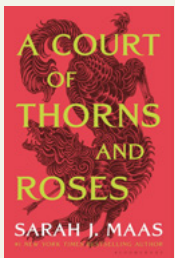


**LAST NIGHT AT THE TELEGRAPH CLUB**  
by Malinda Lo  
Why this book matters:  
[bit.ly/telegraphclubBR](https://bit.ly/telegraphclubBR)



**TRICKS**  
by Ellen Hopkins  
Why this book matters:  
[bit.ly/tricksBR](https://bit.ly/tricksBR)

7

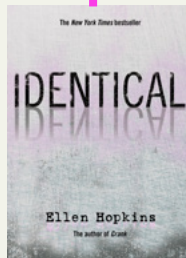


**A COURT OF THORNS AND ROSES**  
by Sarah J. Maas  
Why this book matters:  
[bit.ly/thornsBR](https://bit.ly/thornsBR)

8  
(TIE)



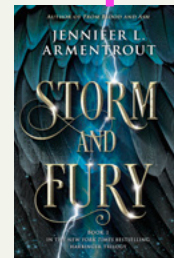
**A CLOCKWORK ORANGE**  
by Anthony Burgess  
Why this book matters:  
[bit.ly/clockworkorangeBR](https://bit.ly/clockworkorangeBR)



**IDENTICAL**  
by Ellen Hopkins  
Why this book matters:  
[bit.ly/identicalBR](https://bit.ly/identicalBR)



**LOOKING FOR ALASKA**  
by John Green  
Why this book matters:  
[bit.ly/alaskaBR](https://bit.ly/alaskaBR)



**STORM AND FURY**  
by Jennifer L. Armentrout  
Why this book matters:  
[bit.ly/stormBR](https://bit.ly/stormBR)