



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Rachel May

Senator Rachel May Protects Freedom to Read with New Legislation

DAN MESSINEO April 27, 2023

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Syracuse, NY – This week, Senator Rachel May (D-48th District) introduced the Freedom to Read Act (S6350), requiring school districts to ensure school libraries provide students with access to an array of age-appropriate materials. Assembly Member Daniel O'Donnell (D-69th District) will introduce an Assembly companion bill.

According to PEN America, instances of book banning have skyrocketed during the first half of the 2022-2023 school year. There have been nearly 15 hundred instances of book banning, with more than 850 titles prohibited, a 28 percent increase compared to the prior six months. PEN America found that Texas, Florida, Missouri, Utah, and South Carolina are the top five states for book banning, primarily books with race and LGBTQ+ topics and themes.

Ample research shows that children are more excited and, therefore, more likely, to read books that feature characters with whom they can identify. Moreover, "protecting" children from negative information or harsh realities about issues like the history of slavery or injustice makes them less resilient and less vigilant about preventing such outcomes in the future.

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“With our rich diversity and our commitment to free expression in New York State, we must ensure students have access to a broad range of materials to let them pursue a love of learning and reading. My bill, the Freedom to Read Act, ensures that students have access to many perspectives that can enrich their minds and broaden their perspectives. Whether they embrace or reject those perspectives, the opportunity to explore challenging ideas is valuable to students' development as learners and as active participants in our society,” said Senator Rachel May.

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Assembly Member O'Donnell said, "I am proud to carry the Freedom to Read act in the Assembly and support a diversity of reading materials for all students in New York. It is important for all New York students to have access to a broad range of stories in their school libraries. We should not shy away from historically important reading material just because a topic requires thought and discussion, and students from different backgrounds should not be prohibited from reading historical materials that reflect their own families. As other states across the country try and silence stories about LGBTQ people, civil rights leaders, and

more, New York State should make it clear that we welcome stories that reflect the true diversity of our world."