

'First of Its Kind' Illinois Law Will Penalize Libraries That Ban Books

A new law signed in Illinois on Monday will require the state's libraries to uphold a pledge not to ban material because of partisan disapproval, starting on Jan. 1, 2024

By [Associated Press](#)

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In this screenshot from a livestream broadcast by the State of Illinois, Gov. J.B. Pritzker signs a bill, Monday, June 12, 2023, at Harold Washington Library's Thomas Hughes Children's Library in downtown Chicago. The new law will require the state's libraries to uphold a pledge not to ban material because of partisan disapproval, starting on Jan. 1, 2024. If they refuse, they will not receive state funding. Pritzker said the law will make Illinois the first state in the nation to outlaw book bans. (State of Illinois via AP) **UNCREDITED**

CHICAGO (AP) — [Illinois](#) Gov. J.B. Pritzker on Monday signed into law a bill that he says will make Illinois the first state in the nation to outlaw book bans.

Illinois public libraries that restrict or ban materials because of “partisan or doctrinal” disapproval will be ineligible for state funding as of Jan. 1, 2024, when the [new law](#) goes into effect.

“We are not saying that every book should be in every single library,” said Illinois Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias, who is also the state librarian and was the [driving force behind the legislation](#). “What this law does is it says, let’s trust our experience and education of our librarians to decide what books should be in circulation.”

The new law comes into play as states across the U.S. push to remove certain books in schools and libraries, especially those about [LGBTQ+ themes](#) and by people of color. The American

Library Association in March announced that attempts to censor books in schools and public libraries [reached a 20-year high](#) in 2022 — twice as many as 2021, the previous record.

“Illinois legislation responds to disturbing circumstances of censorship and an environment of suspicion,” said Deborah Caldwell-Stone, director of the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom and executive director of the Freedom to Read Foundation.

To be eligible for state funds, Illinois public libraries must adopt the American Library Association’s [Library Bill of Rights](#), which holds that “materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation,” or subscribe to a similar pledge.

Downers Grove Democrat Rep. Anne Stava-Murray sponsored the legislation in the Illinois House of Representatives after a school board in her district was subject to pressure to ban certain content from school libraries.

“While it’s true that kids need guidance, and that some ideas can be objectionable, trying to weaponize local government to force one-size-fits-all standards onto the entire community for reasons of bigotry, or as a substitute for active and involved parenting, is wrong,” Stava-Murray said Monday at the bill’s signing, which took place at a children’s library in downtown Chicago.

Despite Giannoulas’ assertion that “this should not be a Democrat or Republican issue,” lawmakers’ approval of the bill splintered across party lines, with Republicans in opposition.

“I support local control,” said House Minority Leader Tony McCombie, a Republican who voted against the measure, in an emailed statement. “Our caucus does not believe in banning books, but we do believe that the content of books should be considered in their placement on the shelves.”

Savage is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

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