



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on January 20, 2024

Florida Republicans' Proposal Would Scale Back School Book Restrictions

Are Florida Republicans doing an about-face on one of their biggest recent culture-war victories in recent years?

Republicans in the GOP-dominated Florida Legislature have introduced legislation to modify a previously enacted policy that allows citizens to challenge books they deem inappropriate for placement in a school library and then have these books removed from the shelves at school facilities.

The current law, passed last year, makes it possible for books that have been challenged as pornographic to be removed from student access within five days — and then remain out of circulation so long as the challenge is arbitrated. Ultimately, the book in question can be permanently removed or prohibited for certain grade levels.

But as [Politico](#) notes, the newly introduced amendment would allow schools to charge individuals a fee of \$100 if they wish to present objections to more than five books. Democrats and the media are interpreting this proposed limit as a tacit admission that Republicans went too far and created a “logistical nightmare” for schools.

Rep. Dana Trabulsy, the Republican sponsor of the new bill, said: “I’m happy that we are digging in and trying to remove reading material that is inappropriate for our children. But I think [book challengers] really need to be respectful of the amount of books that they are pouring into schools at one time.”

The proposal from Trabulsy would make it so that the \$100 kicks in if the person bringing the book objection does not have a student in the district; the money would be given back if the objection is withheld.

Thus far, members of the Florida House have advanced this bill through two committees. A challenge for it to become law, however, is the fact that the Florida Senate does not at this moment have similar legislation. Senate President Kathleen Passidomo told the media this week that her chamber has “not yet looked into” it.

The 2023 law has been the subject of extreme controversy, prompting heated opposition from Democrats and left-wing activists and resulting in lawsuits against both school boards and state-level education officials on the grounds that the law violates free speech.

As [Politico](#) reports:

Even conservative pundit Bill O’Reilly derided the law after school officials in Escambia County removed two of his books — “Killing Jesus: A History” and “Killing Reagan: The



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Violent Assault That Changed a Presidency” — pending a review for possible [depictions of] sexual conduct. O’Reilly told Newsweek he implored the state and Gov. Ron DeSantis to take action because the policy is “far too nebulous in Tallahassee” and needs to be “tightened up.”

State officials including [Republican Gov. Ron] DeSantis, however, have downplayed accusations that the state is “banning” books and labeled the claims as a “hoax.” DeSantis and other conservatives argue the law is meant to target books that broach sensitive topics like sexuality and gender orientation — such as “Gender Queer: A Memoir” for showing sex acts and “Flamer,” which depicts young boys performing sexual acts at a summer camp.

Florida House Speaker Paul Renner’s spokesman, Andres Malave, said his boss supports the original law and sees it as vital to keeping pornographic material away from children. But he also said the new proposal will help “weed out the possibility of abuse in the process, encouraging only legitimate claims to be brought forward for review.”

Sue Woltanski, chair of the Monroe County School Board, expressed a similar sentiment, telling *Politico*: “It is a burden, and we need to make sure that the books that are being removed from the children are actually obscene. If they are challenged for frivolous reasons, well maybe it will stop that, and we’ll be able to focus on getting the books that really could be harmful to children out of the library.”

But not everyone is happy with the idea of limiting the 2023 law. Florida Citizens Alliance, a conservative group that has played an active role in book challenges, opposes the proposal out of concerns that it will “backtrack” the current parental-rights policy.

It remains to be seen whether the proponents of the proposal will get their way; support for the bill has been bipartisan in the House, but the Senate’s slowness in reciprocating the measure casts doubt on its future.

Another factor is the governor: DeSantis’ signing of the original legislation was hailed as a major win for parental rights among his base. Would he be willing to sign what amounts to a walk-back knowing that doing so could alienate his most ardent grassroots supporters? Especially while he is trying to court that base during his presidential run in the Republican primary?

The Left is clearly ready to proclaim victory if Republicans give in on this issue. Do the GOP supporters of Trabulsy’s bill have legitimate cause to want to rein in the original legislation? Or is this another case of Republicans taking one step forward and two steps back?





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