

**General Convention of The Episcopal Church 2024
Archives' Research Report**

Resolution No.: 2024-D039
Title: Condemning Censorship
Proposer: Smith, Ms. Dianne Audrick
Topic: Human Rights, LGBTQ, Racism

Directly Related: (Attached)

None

Indirectly Related: (Available in the [Acts of Convention](#) database, searchable by resolution number)

None

In preparing this report, the Archives researched the resolutions in the Acts of Convention database for the period 1973 through 2022, selecting “direct” resolutions that have a substantive bearing on the proposed legislation. The “direct” resolutions are attached and “indirect” resolutions are available in the Acts of Convention database. Committee members who require other research assistance should contact the Archives through the [Research Request Form](#).

D039 - Condemning Censorship

Final Status: Not Yet Finalized

Proposed by: Smith, Ms. Dianne Audrick

Endorsed by: Conley, Canon Judith, Pierce, Mr. James

Supported by: The Union of Black Episcopalians

Has Budget Implications: No

Cost:

Amends C&C or Rules of Order: No

Requests New Interim Body: No

Changes Mandate Of Existing Ib: No

Directs Dfms Staff: Yes

Directs Dioceses: Yes

Directs Executive Council: No

HiA: HD

Legislative Committee Currently Assigned: 07 - Social Justice & United States Policy

Completion Status: Incomplete

Latest House Action: N/A

Supporting Documents: No

Resolution Text

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring,

That the 81st General Convention calls upon dioceses, congregations, and the Office of Government Relations to condemn the recent surge in actions to restrict access to or censor information in public schools and libraries by advocating for the elimination of the banning of books and information in any form that are not only damaging to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more (LGBTQIA+) individuals as well as individuals who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) but the Beloved Community as a whole; and be it further

Resolved, That The Episcopal Church take action to safeguard people's rights to access diverse books and information resources in schools, libraries, textbook selection and review committees, bookstores, online, and other relevant platforms and that this Resolution be communicated to all Dioceses for action.

Explanation

In The Episcopal Church, we firmly believe in the power of intellectual freedom, the beauty of the diversity of thought, and the importance of open discourse within the Beloved Community. These principles not only foster an environment of inclusivity and respect but also encourage the exploration of new ideas and the growth of individuals and the community as a whole.

The American Library Association released data and statistics about book bans in the United States in 2023 on March 14, 2024. It is alarming to note that in 2023, 4,240 book titles were censored. The significant number highlights the urgency of protecting our fundamental rights to access information and express ourselves freely.

The number of targeted titles in 2023 increased significantly by 65%, surpassing the previous year's figure. Compared to 2021, the increase was a staggering 128%.

Censorship is a major challenge faced by many historically marginalized communities. Shockingly, around 47% of the books that are targeted for censorship are written by or about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more (LGBTQIA+) individuals as well as individuals who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). These include both fictional and historical works. Such book bans and censorship clearly send a message to these communities that certain stories and people are considered too dangerous to be part of our society. It is important to note that these challenges are often initiated by a small but vocal minority within our communities.

[1] <https://uniteagainstbookbans.org/2023-book-bans/>

[2] <https://uniteagainstbookbans.org/2023-book-bans/>

Our lives and even our sacred texts are full of challenging stories. Those stories cannot be ignored just because they are challenging. We are called to become a Beloved Community, which requires telling and hearing the truth. Being in a community requires that we hear and allow others to hear the stories of those in our communities who are different from us, especially the stories of those who have historically been marginalized.

Removing, banning, or restricting access to books from public libraries or public schools is a slippery slope to government censorship and the erosion of our country's commitment to freedom of expression. Attempts to restrict the teaching about race in history is revisionist history that can prevent the whole of the community from being included and feeling a sense of belonging.

Censoring information and banning books not only represents a dangerous attempt at engaging in revisionist history but also, more importantly, excludes certain community members from being recognized and included in the community's story. This exclusion is not just an injustice but a clear and significant threat to our community's unity and progress that we must address.

The Episcopal Church recognizes parents' role in guiding their children and that bans on materials limit access to materials that can help children and others better understand themselves and fellow members of their community. Book bans and censorship are often disguised as a means to protect young people and other readers from inappropriate or potentially upsetting materials. However, we recognize these attempts as blatant violations of our freedom to access information and make our own choices.

Other national organizations like Unite Against Book Bans, the African American Policy Forum, the Human Rights Alliance, the Interfaith Alliance, the National Education Alliance, and the National Coalition Against Censorship already are addressing the censorship of information and potentially could be excellent sources of information as well as partnership.

It is crucial, therefore, to recognize that any actions that undermine our efforts to become a Beloved Community and erode our progress toward creating a truly diverse and inclusive society are detrimental to our goals. The Episcopal Church opposes efforts to censor materials that focus on and affirm the lives of members of the LGBTQIA+ communities and other historically marginalized communities as well as efforts to censor materials about racial justice and the history or racism. We must oppose such efforts and work towards fostering a culture of open dialogue, free expression, and intellectual freedom. The Episcopal Church, with unwavering commitment, not only affirms but champions its dedication to intellectual freedom, diversity of thought, and open discourse within our communities while opposing any actions that contradict these values. This commitment is not just a source of reassurance and unity but a beacon of hope and progress for us all.

Supporting Resolutions

Calls upon all Episcopalians, dioceses, parishes, and institutions to actively urge their elected officials to champion the inclusion and promotion of Black history education while steadfastly opposing any efforts to eliminate, restrict, or impede the teaching of Black history. (2023 MBMW 001)

https://extranet.generalconvention.org/governing_and_interim_bodies/executive_council/resolution?id=451

Oppose any laws that make the teaching of ethnic studies illegal and penalize school districts financially for incorporating ethnic studies in their curriculums. (EC 012012.04)

https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/executive_council/EXCresolution.pl?exc_id=EXC012012.04

That the church gives strong support to responsible local public and private school programs of education in human sexuality. (GC 1988-A089)

https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=1988-A089

Urge the Church to increase dialogue and improve education on racial injustice and to create and share resources on curriculum and programs dedicated to ministries of reconciliation. (GC2015-A182) https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2015-A182

Deplore the desecration of any religious text or space and call upon all people to respect religious diversity and never to defame or abuse that which is considered holy by others. (EC 062005.38 [Executive Council: Resolution # EXC062005.38 \(episcopalarchives.org\)](#))

Note: this resolution and/or its explanation contains external references, such as URLs of websites, that may not be in the required languages of General Convention. Because of copyright restrictions, the General Convention cannot provide translations. However, your web browser may be able to provide a machine translation into another language. If you need assistance with this, please contact gc.support@episcopalchurch.org.