

to do the work.”

Biden is seeking reelection this year and the leading Republican candidate is former President Donald Trump, who signed an executive order to keep Guantánamo open while threatening to fill the camp with “some bad dudes,” although he did not transfer anyone to the prison.

On Tuesday, scores of rights groups published an open letter urging Biden to permanently close Gitmo.

“Whether Guantánamo and its injustices continue or—as you promised—end, will be a defining part of your legacy and this pivotal year of your presidency may be the last chance at closing it,” the letter states. “It is long past time for a meaningful reckoning with the full scope of damage caused by U.S. policies in response

to 9/11 and through the so-called ‘War on Terror.’”

“Closing Guantánamo, ending indefinite military detention of those held there, and never again using the military base for unlawful mass detention of any group of people are necessary steps towards those ends—and to combating dehumanizing and Islamophobic narratives,” the signers added. “We urge you to act without delay, and in a just manner that considers the harm done to the men who have been imprisoned without charge or fair trials for over two decades.”

BIO: Brett Wilkins is a staff writer for *Common Dreams*. Their work is licensed under Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0). Articles are free to republish and share widely.



A student holds a placard at a walkout protesting Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis’ attacks on public education outside Orlando City Hall on April 21, 2023 in Orlando, Florida. (Photo: Paul Hennessy/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images)

‘NO, THIS IS NOT A PARODY’: FLORIDA SCHOOL DISTRICT BANS DICTIONARIES UNDER DESANTIS LAW

Webster’s Dictionary & Thesaurus and The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank are among the books that the Escambia County School District has yanked from library shelves.

By Jake Johnson, Jan 10, 2024

Dictionaries and encyclopedias are among the more than 2,800 books that a Florida school district has pulled from library shelves in an effort to comply with a law that Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed last year.

Judd Legum, author of the *Popular Information* newsletter, reported Wednesday that the Escambia County School District said the books that have been banned pending further investigation “may violate H.B. 1069,” which “gives residents the right to demand the removal of any library book that ‘depicts or describes sexual conduct,’ as defined under Florida law, whether or not the book is pornographic.”

“Rather than considering complaints, the Escambia County School Board adopted an emergency rule last June that required the district’s librarians to conduct a review of all library books and remove titles that may violate H.B. 1069,” Legum noted. “Each school in Escambia County has thousands of titles. As a result, many school libraries were closed at the beginning of the school year pending the completion of the review.”

Florida led the United States in book bans during the 2022-2023 school year, with PEN America documenting 1,972 instances of bans across 37 districts.

“In a state with approximately 70 districts, this means that over half of all Florida school districts experienced banning activity,” PEN noted in a recent report.

PEN, Penguin Random House, and a coalition of authors joined parents and students last year in filing a lawsuit against Escambia County in federal court, arguing that the mass removal of books from

school libraries violates the plaintiffs’ “rights to free speech and equal protection under the law.”

A hearing in the case was scheduled to take place on Wednesday. Florida’s Republican attorney is backing Escambia’s school board.

“In a brief submitted by the state of Florida in support of Escambia, Attorney General Ashley Moody argued that the school board could ban books for any reason because the purpose of public school libraries is to ‘convey the government’s message,’ and that can be accomplished through ‘the removal of speech that the government disapproves,’” Legum noted Wednesday. “This is a novel argument about the purpose of school libraries.

In addition to *Webster’s Dictionary & Thesaurus for Students* and *The American Heritage Children’s Dictionary*, Escambia County is denying students access to biographies of former Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, the singer and songwriter Beyoncé, and talk show host Oprah Winfrey, according to a list obtained by the Florida Freedom to Read Project.

The list also includes *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank.

“The Escambia County School Board banned most of these books at the request of Vicki Baggett, a high school English teacher in the county,” Legum reported. “Baggett is responsible for hundreds of challenges in Escambia County and neighboring counties.”

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