

The State of AMERICA'S LIBRARIES

2023

LIBRARIES *adapt* AND *innovate*
IN THE MIDST OF RECORD-BREAKING
censorship challenges.



A report from ALA American Library Association

From the Executive Director

TRACIE D. HALL



This year's edition of the State of America's Libraries finds libraries literally and figuratively at the epicenter of the dialogue (and debate) about the wellbeing of our communities, the health of our economy, and the state of our democracy as the nation seeks to rebound from the enduring COVID-19 pandemic and recognizes expanding information and digital access as critical to that recovery.

Many libraries and their staffs nationwide—school, public, college and university, special, carceral, and consortial—found themselves contending with reduced funding and staffing, threats to personal safety in the form of bomb scares and to professional livelihoods from [firings and job losses](#), and bills threatening to criminally charge librarians or defund libraries altogether for making certain materials available on their shelves or findable through reference services. Despite these pressures, libraries have proven themselves to be among the most adaptable of public and community-serving institutions. Just as they have faced numerous challenges, they have also found themselves needed in new and profound ways by their constituencies and, in responding to these rising demands, have found a way to innovate hybrid-service delivery models and programs that increasingly seek to get to the root causes of information, education, and socio-economic inequities and create opportunities in those same spaces.

Across the country, we have seen an emphasis on mental health and trauma resources, support for people who are neurodivergent or coping with memory loss, job upskilling and business-entrepreneurship programs, school libraries advancing instruction, academic freedom advocacy in higher education, and an increasing push towards open access and digital instruction in libraries.

Though there is continued recognition and public support for the work that libraries do as well as the symbolic role that libraries play in the maintenance of our democratic values as a nation, the steep surge of legislation that increasingly positions and compels library workers on and to the frontlines of book banning and censorship challenges demands that the LIS sector (including LIS education) and the American Library Association (ALA) expand opportunities for education and training on the tenets of intellectual freedom. Such endeavors will help build the competencies and capacity needed by our current and future workforce to not only help us to protect the right to read, but preserve library services more broadly. Towards that end, the information and data contained in this report, the presentation of new ALA platforms like [Unite Against Book Bans](#) and long-standing ones such as Banned Books Week or the review of the Top 13 Most Challenged Books of 2022 should not just be seen as data to consume, but rather as tools that can help libraries convene, empower, and mobilize their campuses and communities. It is our greatest hope that this report inspires all who read it to more clearly understand the power and more deeply mine the potential of America's libraries.

Tracie D. Hall is executive director of the American Library Association

The State of AMERICA'S LIBRARIES 2023

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INTRODUCTION

There's More to the Story

LESSA KANANI'OPUA PELAYO-LOZADA



Over the last few years, our communities, our library workers, and our libraries have had to be braver than we ever thought possible. Living in the shadow of a global pandemic and navigating our new normal, we have

also continued to face unprecedented attempts to ban books and other assaults on the freedom to read. In the face of these changes and challenges, our libraries have found opportunity and our communities have shown that there's more to the story for everyone.

Our brave communities have used libraries to learn, be creative, and gain access to information. Our brave communities have used libraries to start small businesses, record podcasts, and earn their high school diplomas. Our brave communities have used libraries as safe havens for all ages, where anyone can be transported to Narnia or Wakanda and let their imaginations soar.

Our library story is the story of our communities. We grow, adapt, and change for their needs, and we focus our services on the values and ideals of our communities. As trusted institutions, libraries are the last bastion of democracy that is truly inclusive and free. Our professional values of intellectual freedom and social responsibility speak to the stories we can share in our libraries—stories of success and rising above.

When I visited Park View Middle School in Cranston, Rhode Island, librarian Stephanie Mills shared with me the stories of her students and how they embraced virtual and hybrid spaces to keep themselves connected to each other, to

books, and to the library. The students themselves described books with queer characters and stories with swear words that made them feel seen. For students who visit the library—sometimes multiple times a day, whether virtual or physical—it is their grounding place and will remain so throughout their

lives. The stories of these students and of their librarian motivate us to unite against book bans, be brave for our communities, and ensure access to information for all.

As a former children's librarian, I know that stories are the foundation of almost everything. As a mixed-race Native Hawaiian woman born and raised in the continental United States, I know that access to my own stories and histories, as well as those of others, is essential to creating the society we try to model in libraries. When we talk about inclusion and being seen, we mean included and seen in all the intersectionalities of our lives, including race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, ability, socioeconomic status, and more. When we talk about inclusion in libraries, we take all of these into account and take the wholeness and humanness of our communities into account, which is why we are the trusted institutions in our communities. It is

also why, despite the pushback against us, we continue to be there for those who need us year after year. There is always more to the story, and the library is here to make sure those stories get heard.

Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada is 2022–2023 president of the American Library Association and Adult Services Assistant Manager at Palos Verdes (Calif.) Library District.



ALA's Celebrate National Library Week poster.

2022: A Year of Unprecedented Challenges

DEBORAH CALDWELL-STONE



The American Library Association's (ALA) Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) has compiled information and data about efforts to censor books in libraries for more than 20 years, documenting how censorship in libraries has affected readers, communities, and

the profession. Overall, the story over the decades is one of uplift and perseverance. Libraries and library professionals who are committed to upholding the freedom to read provide a broad range of information resources to students and library users. They support early literacy activities and homeschooling families; assure that there are programs to inform and provide cultural enrichment for all ages; and supply essential data and information to businesses and entrepreneurs—all while ensuring that digital tools and broadband connections are on hand to provide everyone access to the internet, including those seeking to access government services and benefits.

But since the fall of 2020, reports submitted to OIF document a precipitous rise in the number of attempted book bans in school and public libraries across the United States. In 2022, OIF received a record 1,269 book challenges, the highest number of demands to ban books reported to ALA since the Association began compiling data about censorship in libraries. This nearly doubles the 729 challenges reported to OIF in 2021.

Censors targeted 2,571 unique titles in 2022, a 38% increase from the 1,858 unique titles targeted for censorship in 2021. Of those titles, the vast majority were written by or about members of the LGBTQIA+ community or by and about Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color.

Nearly 51% of censorship demands targeted books, materials, displays, and programs in school libraries and schools; 48% targeted public libraries. Most concerning, however, is the fact that 90% of the reported book challenges were demands to censor multiple titles—and of those demands to censor library books, 40% sought to remove or restrict over

These numbers . . . are evidence of a growing, well-organized, conservative political movement whose goals include removing books addressing race, history, gender identity, sexuality, and reproductive health from America's public libraries and school libraries that do not meet their approval.

100 books all at once. But prior to 2020, the vast majority of challenges to library books and resources were brought by a single parent who sought to remove or restrict access to a book their child was reading.

These numbers—and the list of the Top 13 Most Challenged Books of 2022—are evidence of a growing, well-organized, conservative political movement whose goals include removing books addressing race, history, gender identity, sexuality, and reproductive health from America's public libraries and school libraries that do not meet their approval. Using social media and other channels, these groups distribute booklists to their local chapters and individual adherents who then utilize the lists to initiate a mass challenge that can empty the shelves of a library.

Books are no longer the sole target of attacks orchestrated by conservative parent groups and right-wing media. Both school and public librarians are increasingly in the crosshairs of conservative groups during book challenges and subject to defamatory name-calling, online harassment, social media attacks, and doxxing, as well as direct threats to their safety, their employment, and their very liberty.

In 2022, legislators and elected officials in 12 states initiated legislation to amend state criminal obscenity statutes



in order to permit criminal prosecution of librarians and educators for distributing materials falsely claimed to be illegal and inappropriate for minors. For example: In Missouri, SB 775, signed into law in August 2022, requires school librarians to remove books claimed to be “explicit sexual material” or face criminal prosecution. As a result, hundreds of works of classic and contemporary literature, as well as works pertaining to health, wellbeing, and the sciences, have been removed from Missouri’s school libraries.

In December 2022, Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry introduced a “Protecting Minors” tip line for Louisiana residents to report librarians, teachers, school board members, district superintendents, and library supervisors who share books and resources addressing gender identity, sexual orientation, and materials addressing puberty, even as Landry admitted that the books being challenged in Louisiana’s public libraries were legal, constitutionally protected materials.

In communities and states where libraries, librarians, and board members have stood up against organized book challenges, there have been attacks on funding sources for libraries. Boundary County Library in Bonners Ferry, Idaho, closed when a group demanding the removal of books

that were not even in the library’s collection threatened to sue, causing the library’s insurer to cancel its insurance. In Jamestown Township, Michigan, a vocal conservative and religious group campaigned to defeat Patmos Library’s funding levy as a means of forcing the removal of six books with LGBTQIA+ themes. The group was successful, which means that Patmos’ access to life-changing services for job seekers, new computer users, budding readers, entrepreneurs, veterans, and tax filers will cease when Patmos Library runs out of cash.

Missouri Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft and state legislators are threatening to deny essential state aid to Missouri’s public libraries if their demands to censor books that they deem inappropriate are not met, which will likely close small and rural libraries throughout the state, ending access to essential library services for many Missourians.

Nevertheless, librarians, library users, and library champions are standing up to the censors and defending the freedom to read in libraries. With the assistance of the Missouri ACLU, the Missouri Library Association and the Missouri Association of School Librarians have gone to court to challenge the constitutionality of SB 775, arguing that no

Every Book Banned Leaves A Hole In A Child's Learning



Unite Against Book Bans Instagram graphic.

© 2023 UNITE AGAINST BOOK BANS



school librarian should be required to violate their students' First Amendment rights under threat of criminal prosecution. Citizens in Llano County, Texas, successfully sued in federal court to require the county and public library board to reinstate books removed from library shelves. And in Virginia Beach, Virginia, a state court dismissed an action filed by a local political candidate seeking to declare two books obscene for viewing by minors, holding that there was no evidence presented that either book (*Gender Queer* and *A Court of Mist and Fury*) was obscene.

Local residents are joining with librarians, library trustees, board members, parents, and library advocates from all walks of life to form groups like Texans Right to Read, Louisianans Against Censorship, FReadom Fighters, and more across the country. And thousands of individuals have joined Unite Against Book Bans since its debut in April of 2022.

[Unite Against Book Bans](#), an ALA initiative, is a broad coalition of more than 65 national partners, state affiliates, local organizations, and more than 10,000 individuals who trust people to make their own decisions about what to read. They

have harnessed their collective power to stand up together to fight censorship. They are standing up for libraries and library workers—the very people who protect the First Amendment rights of readers of all ages and ensure that everyone is able to use and access the library's resources, making the promise of the freedom to read a reality.

“At a time when government, civic institutions and even facts themselves have come under withering partisan attack, our libraries have become more important than ever. Their solemn place as safe spaces for truth and learning help nurture our kids, making for stronger citizens, stronger families and stronger communities. There are few better places for a child to spend time, and fewer worse places to make a political scapegoat.”—*The Tampa Bay Tribune* Editorial Board, March 10, 2023.

Deborah Caldwell-Stone is director of ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom.

TDP 13

MOST CHALLENGED BOOKS OF 2022

The American Library Association tracked **1,269 challenges** to library, school, and university materials and services in 2022. Of the **2,571 unique titles** that were challenged or banned in 2022, here are the top 13 most challenged.



1

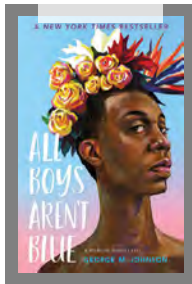


GENDER QUEER

by Maia Kobabe

REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, claimed to be sexually explicit

2

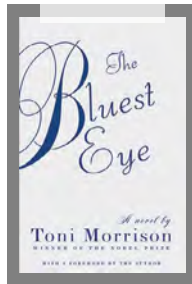


ALL BOYS AREN'T BLUE

by George M. Johnson

REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, claimed to be sexually explicit

3



THE BLUEST EYE

by Toni Morrison

REASONS: rape, incest, claimed to be sexually explicit, EDI content

4

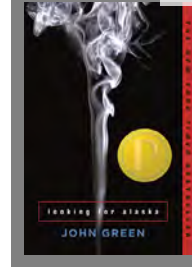


FLAMER

by Mike Curato

REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, claimed to be sexually explicit

5



LOOKING FOR ALASKA

by John Green

REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, LGBTQIA+ content

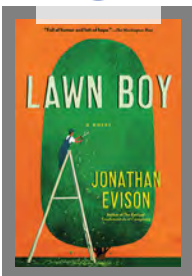


THE PERKS OF BEING A WALLFLOWER

by Stephen Chbosky

REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, LGBTQIA+ content, rape, drugs, profanity

7

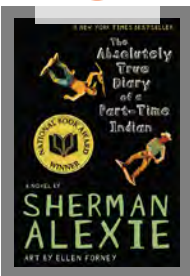


LAWN BOY

by Jonathan Evison

REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, claimed to be sexually explicit

8



THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY OF A PART-TIME INDIAN

by Sherman Alexie

REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, profanity

9

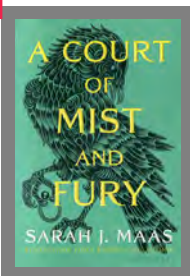


OUT OF DARKNESS

by Ashley Hope Perez

REASON: claimed to be sexually explicit

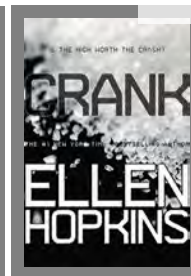
10



A COURT OF MIST AND FURY

by Sarah J. Maas

REASON: claimed to be sexually explicit



CRANK

by Ellen Hopkins

REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, drugs



ME AND EARL AND THE DYING GIRL

by Jesse Andrews

REASONS: claimed to be sexually explicit, profanity



THIS BOOK IS GAY

by Juno Dawson

REASONS: LGBTQIA+ content, sex education, claimed to be sexually explicit



OFFICE FOR
Intellectual Freedom
American Library Association

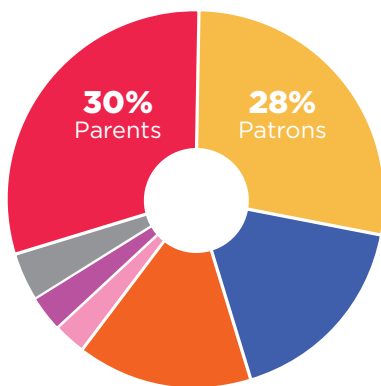
CENSORSHIP

BY THE NUMBERS

In 2022, the American Library Association tracked the highest number of attempted book bans since ALA began compiling data about censorship in libraries more than 20 years ago; 2,571 unique titles were challenged last year, up from 1,858 in 2021. [Learn more at ala.org/bbooks](https://www.ala.org/bbooks)



WHO INITIATES CHALLENGES?



- 17%** Political/religious groups
- 15%** Board/administration
- 3%** Librarians/teachers
- 3%** Elected officials
- 4%** Other
(Includes non-custodial relatives, nonresidents, community members without library cards, etc.)

Statistics based on 1,207 cases with known initiators.

WHERE DO CHALLENGES TAKE PLACE?



48%
Public libraries



41%
School libraries



10%
Schools

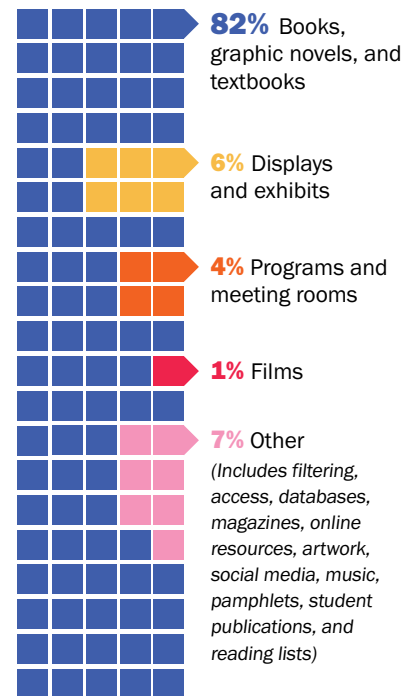


1%
Higher education libraries and other institutions

Statistics based on 1,264 cases with known locations.

BOOKS AND BEYOND

ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom tracked **1,269 challenges** in 2022. Here's the breakdown:



(Includes filtering, access, databases, magazines, online resources, artwork, social media, music, pamphlets, student publications, and reading lists)

CENSORSHIP ON THE RISE

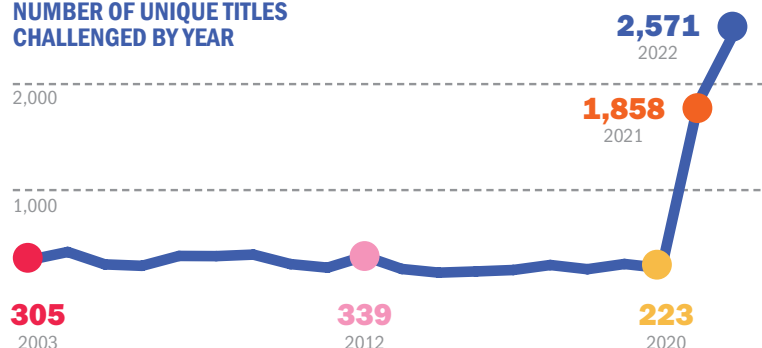
The unparalleled number of reported book challenges in 2022 nearly doubled the number reported in 2021. The number of unique titles targeted marked a 38% increase over 2021.

CENSORSHIP
STATISTICS
COMPILED BY:



OFFICE FOR
Intellectual Freedom
American Library Association

NUMBER OF UNIQUE TITLES CHALLENGED BY YEAR



Librarians on the FRONTLINE

A Record Year for Challenges in School Libraries

2022 SAW AN UNPRECEDENTED INCREASE IN BOOK BANS AND CHALLENGES ESPECIALLY IN SCHOOL LIBRARIES. AND STANDING AT THE FRONTLINES AGAINST THESE ATTACKS TO DEFEND THE FREEDOM TO READ FOR HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF YOUNG READERS WERE SCHOOL LIBRARIANS. THE NATIONAL PRESS TOOK NOTICE.



WITH RISING BOOK BANS, LIBRARIANS HAVE COME UNDER ATTACK

New York Times, July 6, 2022



ALUMNA WHO FOUGHT BOOK BAN AS SCHOOL LIBRARIAN RECEIVES NATIONAL AWARD

Rutgers University, July 22, 2022



THE SCHOOL LIBRARY USED TO BE A SANCTUARY. NOW IT'S A BATTLEGROUND

CNN, October 31, 2022



SCHOOL LIBRARIANS VILIFIED AS THE 'ARM OF SATAN' IN BOOK-BANNING WARS

The Los Angeles Times, January 27, 2023



N.J. LIBRARIAN WHO FOUGHT BOOK BANNING CO-CREATES APP TO HELP OTHERS DO THE SAME

NJ.com, September 13, 2022



SCHOOLS NATIONWIDE ARE QUIETLY REMOVING BOOKS FROM THEIR LIBRARIES: MEET THE LIBRARIANS FIGHTING BANS AND SCRAMBLING TO PRESERVE CHILDREN'S FREEDOM TO READ

Washington Post, March 22, 2022

Forward Momentum

A YEAR OF ADAPTABILITY AND INNOVATION

EDITED BY PHIL MOREHART

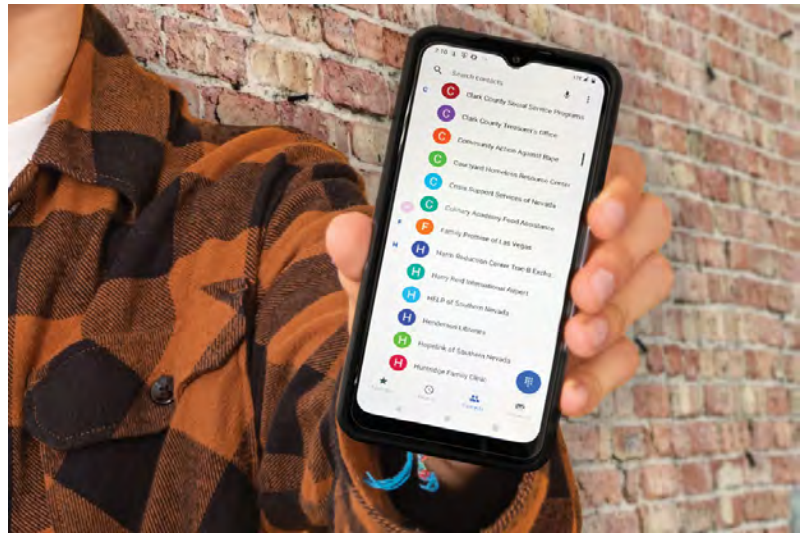
2022 was a year of continued change: The global COVID-19 pandemic entered its third year; book bans across the U.S. surged beyond numbers recorded over the last two decades; political, economic, and digital divides grew. But despite these upheavals, libraries thrived—specifically because they addressed these and many other challenges, while pivoting to offer new and updated services to their communities. Adaptation and innovation shined in 2022, proving that there truly is “more to the story” at libraries. Here are some standouts:

CONNECTING THE UNHOUSED TO TECH

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact communities in 2022, particularly in terms of digital equity. Libraries took the reins masterfully, offering technological and connectivity assistance to those in need.

When Las Vegas–Clark County Library District (LVCCCLD) in Nevada closed its doors at the start of the pandemic, the technological barriers that existed within the community were laid bare, especially those affecting people facing homelessness. In April 2022, [LVCCCLD launched its Cellphone Lending Program](#), an innovative approach to providing access to needed services and social connection. Since its inception, LVCCCLD has provided more than 400 smartphones to unhoused people, offering them a lifeline to family, support systems, and critical social services.

The phones are loaned for an 18-month period and have unlimited calls and 5G hotspot capability. Each phone is programmed with more than 50 social service provider contacts, offering easy assistance with food, healthcare, housing, and other general services, as well as five of the most used library apps. For those who needed help with their smartphones, LVCCCLD and its partners organized a vendor fair alongside the phone distribution, which included training, a Q&A session, and other resources. At the end of the lending



Each phone in Las Vegas–Clark County (Nev.) Library District’s Cellphone Lending Program was loaded with more than 50 social service provider contacts.

PHOTOS: ©CARBALLO/ADOBE STOCK (PERSON); LAS VEGAS-CLARK COUNTY (NEV.) LIBRARY DISTRICT (PHONE)

period, recipients are able to keep their phones and phone numbers and can arrange a contract with any telecom provider at their own expense.

“Access to technology is a basic human right,” Kelvin Watson, LVCCCLD executive director, told *American Libraries*. “Our Cellphone Lending Program is an example of how public libraries empower and uplift members of underserved communities by finding innovative ways to expand that access.”

ENHANCED LIBRARY CARDS INCREASE ACCESS

Photo identification is an essential part of American life. But for large swaths of the populace, photo IDs can be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain. Enhanced library cards can be an alternative. These cards are designed to address the need for



Patrons display their new enhanced library cards after April 6, 2022, sign-up event at the Fairbanks branch of Harris County (Tex.) Public Library. The cards offer another form of ID.

PHOTO: NANCY HU/HARRIS COUNTY (TEX.) PUBLIC LIBRARY

photo IDs, often displaying the holder's photo, name, date of birth, address, and gender. Many public libraries in Texas are leading the way on getting these cards into people's hands.

The demand for enhanced library cards gained urgency in early 2018, with the onset of then-President Donald Trump's immigration policies and the termination of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Also in 2018, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott signed into law SB4, known as the "show me your papers" law, which requires local governments and law enforcement agencies to cooperate with federal immigration officers.

In addition to immigrant and undocumented communities, the cards can be beneficial for unhoused people, formerly incarcerated individuals, those working toward ID recovery following fraud or a natural disaster, and LGBTQ+ people in need of gender-affirming identification. Libraries are uniquely equipped to provide this form of identification, say advocates of

the IDs, because public libraries protect patron privacy and are not subject to SB4.

In Harris County, Texas, a county commissioner contacted Harris County Public Library (HCPL) to ask if the library could legally issue these photo identification cards. After consulting with county attorneys, HCPL determined it could issue cards but with a crucial stipulation: Neither the library nor Harris County has the authority to say that anyone is required to take it as legal identification.

The library was approved for \$297,000 to implement the project. The funds cover hardware, software, and supplies needed to print the cards and can be used to cover additional supply-related expenses for several years. HCPL distributed more than 2,000 enhanced library cards in the two months following its mid-March 2022 launch. "The response has been more brisk than I anticipated," Fred Schumacher, circulation services manager at HCPL, [told American Libraries](#).

AN OASIS IN A FOOD DESERT

Hinton, West Virginia, population: 2,800, faced an ongoing problem in late 2021: Misused and abandoned shopping carts were strewn all around the small town. Some community members considered the buggies an eyesore, and stores were finding it hard to recover lost property. The police threatened disciplinary measures for what it referred to as the unlawful removal of buggies.

Summers County Public Library Director Austin Persinger saw the situation differently.

“I read this story through the lens of a rural librarian conducting a reference interview,” [Persinger wrote in American Libraries](#). “What I was being told was that the city and stores suffer because people steal and abandon shopping buggies. But the story that I heard was that there are lower-income people in our community who take these carts because they live in a food desert and lack reliable transportation.”

“Stores in Hinton lie at the bottom of a steep hill. The sidewalk is inadequate and dangerously close to traffic. Depending on where someone lives in the city, going to the store might be one-to-six miles round trip,” Persinger said. “There is no simple or comfortable way for people to carry their groceries home. Buggies make the trip marginally better, but when they’re being pushed uphill on a broken sidewalk—instead of on the polished floors they were designed for—the trip still isn’t easy. After walking many miles to get groceries, walking many more to return a shopping cart seems exhausting and unreasonable.”

Persinger tackled the problem using the Library of Things—a growing movement showing that our institutions can loan so much more than books—as a framework. He solicited donations on different Facebook pages and through the local newspaper to purchase a fleet of lightweight utility wagons for about \$100 each. The library had a fundraising goal of \$1,200 and ended up raising \$2,000, checking out six wagons within a month.

DIGITAL BEEHIVES TEACH KIDS ABOUT THE NATURAL WORLD

Wright Brothers School, a public elementary school in New York City, took a unique and high-tech approach to teaching students about nature and sustainability when it implemented its digital beehive in partnership with the Savannah Bee Company.



Patron Xander Dianen returns a wagon to Summers County (W.Va.) Public Library. The wagons help users without access to transportation carry groceries up a steep hill.

PHOTO: AUSTIN PERSINGER/SUMMERS COUNTY (W.Va.) PUBLIC LIBRARY

Library media specialist Lauren Ginsberg DeVilbiss—one of 10 recipients of the 2023 I Love My Librarian Award—leads conversations and lessons on pollinators, sustainability, food, and the importance of bees, using digital screens that replicate the cross section of a beehive full of active, working bees. The “hives” allow students to witness firsthand how bees work from the safety and comfort of the school library.

Ginsberg DeVilbiss supplements her digital beehive instruction with videos, books, and songs about bees. And beekeepers at the Savannah Bee Company visited with the burgeoning young entomologists at the school to answer questions and teach about honeybees, climate justice, and other sustainable practices.

For Ginsberg DeVilbiss, the beehive shows students the library’s full capabilities while also being very fun.

“The library is more than four walls,” Ginsberg DeVilbiss [told CBS2 New York](#). “It’s how many experiences can my children get from the time they come here in pre-k to the time they leave here in fifth grade that is exposing them to anything,” she said.

CREATING VIRTUAL WORLDS FOR MED STUDENTS

Medical students at Augusta University (AU) in Augusta, Georgia, can now “experience” conditions that they may have

to treat in future patients thanks to librarians at the university's Greenblatt Library.

Jennifer Davis, instructor and scholarship data librarian, Lachelle Smith, health sciences librarian, and Gail Kouame, former assistant director of research and education services at AU and now director of Charles M. Baugh Biomedical Library at University of South Alabama in Mobile, developed a [3D virtual-reality \(VR\) pilot program](#) that emulates vision deficits, from things like macular degeneration or diabetic retinopathy, as well as the effects of Parkinson's disease. By using VR, students can virtually do tasks like open a pill bottle, open a shampoo bottle, and turn on the shower. There is also a simulation for post-stroke rehabilitation. The librarians [told American Libraries](#) that they conceived of the program to help build empathy in health sciences students who would be dealing with patients with those issues. They also built a virtual reality escape room game to teach data management skills to health sciences students.

"The advantage of VR is it's very experiential and very immersive," Kouame said. "It allows a person to experience a situation as though it were almost real To me, it's as close as you can get to sending somebody into, say, an elderly person's apartment and having them open a pill bottle."

KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER

Parents and child caregivers often juggle multiple roles, with work and family time commingling throughout the day. Fairfield Area Library (FAL) in Henrico, Virginia, addressed this issue by helping to make onsite technology access easier for these patrons.

FAL installed innovative workstations designed to help caregivers of small children use the library's computers more effectively. Each station includes a computer desk with an adjacent play enclosure connected to it, letting a caregiver work while the child plays nearby. The play space includes interactive play panels that support early literacy and low set mirrors that encourage tummy time for babies. The workstations reinforce the fact that libraries are for everyone, providing a space that helps facilitate learning and working for adults and their very young.

"This should be in all sorts of spaces where adults have to be stationary, and they need to also be able to keep an eye on their kids," Shay Ramsey-Martin, Children's Public Supervisor at the Fairfield Area Library, [told WRIC](#).

FOSTERING NEW BUSINESS AND CHANGING LIVES

An innovative new program at Gwinnett County Public Library (GCPL) in Georgia has been helping to foster new businesses in the community, with a specific focus on those started by formerly incarcerated individuals.

Funded by Google in partnership with ALA as a part of the Association's [Libraries Build Business](#) initiative, GCPL's New Start Entrepreneurship Incubator provides the formerly incarcerated with the tactics and tools needed to develop a small business and overcome barriers to professional success. Its third cohort ran from July to December 2022; over the course of the 6-month program, the 15 participants received assistance with developing business ideas, learned what is needed to run a successful business, and received one-on-one support from successful entrepreneurs and business experts.

"The whole idea is to ease their transition back into society and make sure that they're successful and that they don't return to prison," [said GCPL Executive Director Charles Pace](#). "Each person that goes through this program and completes it, I've seen their lives be changed and altered in a very profound and significant way. It's programs like this that really alter the trajectory of people's entire life."

GCPL's incubator gives new life and energy to people who are often thrust back into the world post-incarceration to face an unforgiving world. "Coming out into society and trying to find normality again is very hard," said incubator graduate Charles Barber. "Something like this gave me confidence to know that it's a new day. It also gave me the push to excel and do what I wanted to do."

Libraries contribute to economic vitality in virtually every community across the country. Nearly half of libraries in the U.S. provide free services to entrepreneurs who wish to start and grow a business. This ranges from offering free access to market trends databases and hosting business coaching classes to providing incubation space and providing seed capital through business-plan competitions. Simply being an entry point to the entrepreneurial ecosystem by connecting individuals to agencies and resources as well as organizing relevant information is a crucial contribution to local economies—and something at which many libraries already excel.

Phil Morehart is communications manager for the American Library Association

A Lifeline for the Incarcerated

PAYAL PATEL

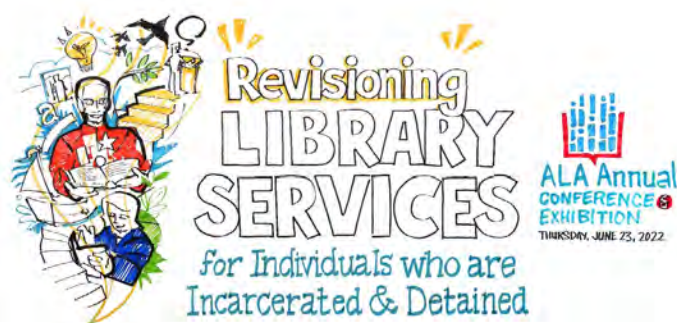
Libraries can be a lifeline for people who are incarcerated or detained at a time “when mass incarceration has now come to represent the likelihood that nearly 50 percent of all adults in America have an immediate family member who has been incarcerated in a jail or prison for at least one night, and this percentage is even higher for Black and Latinx adults in the United States” (Jeanie Austin, *Library Services and Incarceration: Recognizing Barriers, Strengthening Access*, ALA Neal-Schuman, 2022).

The impact of incarceration on the communities that libraries serve is incalculable. In recognition of this harsh reality, a working group of American Library Association (ALA) members—including librarians for incarcerated people, formerly incarcerated librarians, and other justice-involved members—came together to work on a historic reimagining of ALA’s 1992 *Library Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions*.

Building on important foundational documents, such as the recently updated [ALA Statement on Prisoners’ Right to Read](#), the new [ALA Standards for Library Services to the Incarcerated or Detained](#) underscores the tenets of equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility, heeding the current phenomenon of mass incarceration; the inequitable incarceration rates of Black, Indigenous and People of Color; and the rising rates of incarceration of women—especially women of color—LGBTQIA+ individuals, undocumented people, and youth in jails, prisons, and other detention facilities.

Reginald Dwayne Betts, founder and executive director of Freedom Reads—an organization working to transform access to literature in the prison system—offers a shining example of the power of accessibility to books and information in prisons and other detention facilities. After serving nine years in prison, Betts, a critically acclaimed writer, Yale Law School graduate, and a MacArthur Fellow, now works to bring micro libraries and literary ambassadors into prisons to create communities around books.

“[Even before prison], I was convinced that if you could read enough books, it would allow you to survive,” Betts shared at “Defending the Fifth Freedom: Protecting the Right to Read for Incarcerated Individuals,” a program at ALA’s 2022 Annual Conference & Exhibition in Washington, D.C. “I deeply believe



At ALA’s 2022 Annual Conference in Washington, D.C., a broad range of stakeholders came together to participate in a historic hearing that continues to inform the revision of the *Library Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions*.

that literature is our access point to the humanity we cannot touch.”

In 2022, ALA announced a \$2 million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation that would help advance this work and support a collaboration between San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) and ALA aimed at improving and expanding library services for incarcerated individuals both locally and nationally.

Co-led by SFPL’s Jail and Reentry Services team, the [Expanding Information Access for Incarcerated People](#) initiative includes a comprehensive survey of existing models for library services to people in jails and prisons and a revision of outdated standards in collaboration with formerly incarcerated people and librarians. Additionally, the project is piloting digital-literacy training to support people in the process of reentry.

Jeanie Austin, author and jail and reentry services librarian at SFPL, recognizes that the path for this work is not easy, but it is possible through ongoing innovation.

“We need to look outside of what a library is and think of a whole support system,” Austin said. “We have to dream really big in this work.”

Payal Patel is interim director of the American Library Association’s Communications and Marketing Office

Advocates Make Progress for Federal Investment in Libraries

SHAWNDA HINES

Libraries in 2022 saw two federal budgets passed, but the year brought mixed results for library programs. The combined outcome for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 and FY 2023 was a net gain for the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), the leading source of federal funding for America's libraries. The FY 2023 congressional appropriations cycle concluded on December 24, 2022, nearly three months into the 2023 fiscal year (which officially started on October 1, 2022). LSTA received an increase of \$13.5 million, which raised the program to \$211 million. The boost for LSTA in FY 2023 was encouraging to library advocates after a lackluster close to the [FY 2022 budget](#).

The Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) program, a U.S. Department of Education program designed to support school library literacy initiatives, saw similar modest support. The \$1 million increase in FY 2023 made up for the FY 2022 loss of the same amount, with IAL ending the calendar year at \$30 million.

Taken together, the results for the two fiscal year budgets passed in calendar year 2022 represented a return to normal political life as compared to the unprecedented hundreds of millions of dollars libraries saw in supplemental funding during the pandemic, during which additional funding into the trillions was made available. In March 2023, nearly six months into the fiscal year, the final budget agreement between the administration and House and Senate leadership resulted in funding for many library programs significantly below levels originally proposed by Congress. Compared to other domestic programs, level funding for LSTA in FY 2022 was a win. Considered alongside 6% inflation rates, the level funding for IAL and modest increase for LSTA over the two fiscal years amounted to a loss.

The results of FY 2022 were not due to the lack of effort from library advocates. During the same period, libraries saw incremental gains in other areas, including modest increases for library-eligible educational programs such as Education Title IV, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Library of Congress.

Advocates made long-term progress on two fronts. ALA ventured a request for Congress to allocate at least \$20 million in FY 2023 for a new national program to improve library facilities,

inspired by the Build America's Libraries Act (S. 127/H.R. 1581). Although the House bill did not include the requested funding, one of the draft proposals released by the Senate Appropriations Committee did include the funding. While the final FY 2023 appropriations law did not include the requested funding for library facilities, it did include language supporting efforts to assess the condition of library facilities.

Members of ALA and the American Association for School Librarians (AASL) also made progress by advocating for the Right to Read Act ([S. 5064](#) and [H.R. 9056](#)), introduced in October 2022 by Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) and Representative Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ-03) to support and highlight the work of school librarians. Introducing the bill late in this Congress was intended to set up a more vigorous campaign to advance the bill in the 118th Congress that began in January 2023.

The Right to Read Act was designed to ensure all students, including low-income and minority students, children with disabilities, and English-language learners have access to an effective school library staffed by a certified school librarian. The act would have increased student access to fully staffed and appropriately resourced school libraries and authorized funding to meet those needs and would have supported recruitment, retention, and professional development for state-certified school librarians. The legislation also reaffirmed that First Amendment rights apply to school libraries and would have extended liability protections to teachers and school librarians facing challenges to books and employment. Thousands of library advocates participated in a thank-you campaign to the bill's cosponsors, solidifying their support for legislation focusing on school librarians.

While the disappointing federal funding results for libraries in FY 2022 were superseded by increases to key programs in FY 2023, the outcome for 2022 is a wake-up call for library advocates not to rest on past success, but to work even harder to make the case for libraries on Capitol Hill in an increasingly competitive political climate.

Shawnda Hines is deputy director of communications at ALA's Public Policy and Advocacy Office.

A Round of Applause for America's Librarians

CHASE OLLIS

The impact of America's librarians ripples throughout the communities they serve. From defending the freedom to read to teaching digital literacy skills to providing access to everyday needs, librarians are making it happen—and getting recognized for it. Check out some highlights from the past year of librarians making national waves for their work in their communities.

FIGHTING FOR #FREEDOM AND THE RIGHT TO READ



Martha Hickson

For her successful efforts in fending off multiple attempts to ban books and protecting her students' right to read in the school district, as well as her work in raising awareness about censorship among the general public, **Martha Hickson**, a librarian at North Hunterdon High School in Annandale, New Jersey, was awarded the Judith

Krug Outstanding Librarian Award by the National Coalition Against Censorship.



Amanda Jones

Amanda Jones, the embattled school librarian from Live Oak Middle School in Denham Springs, Louisiana, who became a target of advocacy groups in 2022 after speaking out against censorship at Livingston Parish Public Library's board meeting, was awarded the American Association of School Librarians' Intellectual Freedom Award.

"Amanda works hard to ensure that every child in her school is seen and heard, and that their lives are not only reflected in the books on the shelves, but they are able to find books into other worlds and ways of life to

be more empathetic citizens." – Kelsye Baudoin, 2022 Louisiana School Librarian of the Year

Honoring its work in protecting and defending the First



Freedom to Read Foundation
FREE PEOPLE READ FREELY

Amendment right to read and the right of library workers to serve their communities, the *Los Angeles Times* awarded the Freedom to Read Foundation its 2022 Innovators Award Book Prize, which spotlights efforts to bring books, publishing, and storytelling into the future.

"Created to support and defend librarians, the organization is as important and relevant today as it was at its inception in 1969."—*Los Angeles Times* Deputy Managing Editor of Entertainment and Strategy Julia Turner

#FREEDOM FIGHTERS



Becky Calzada and Carolyn Foote

PHOTO: ALLIE LEEPSON AND
JESSE MCCLARY

also recipients of the American Association of School Librarians' 2022 Intellectual Freedom Award.

People featured the critical work by Texas librarians **Becky Calzada** and **Carolyn Foote**, organizers of the #FREedom Fighters campaign, which has been pushing back against efforts by government officials to ban books in the state. Calzada and Foote, along with #FREedom Fighters co-organizer librarian Nancy Jo Lambert, were

"Books shouldn't be contraband."—Carolyn Foote

DIGITAL LITERACY AND INFORMATION ACCESS FOR ALL



Tracie D. Hall

The National Book Foundation recognized **Tracie D. Hall**, executive director of the American Library Association (ALA), with its 2022 Literarian Award for Outstanding Service to the American Literary Community for her years of service and advocacy to eradicate information poverty, provide equitable access to information for incarcerated individuals, and improve digital literacy skills.

“Tracie D. Hall is a courageous champion for readers and libraries. Her accessibility and resource-driven advocacy is especially important at this moment when books are increasingly under attack nationwide. We are so proud to recognize Hall’s tremendous work supporting the individuals and communities who depend on libraries’ services—in other words, everyone.” – Ruth Dickey, executive director of the National Book Foundation



Dr. Kenneth A. Yamashita

Honoring his distinguished career dedicated to confronting injustice and promoting library services to non-traditional communities, ALA awarded retired librarian **Dr. Kenneth A. Yamashita** with the 2022 Joseph W. Lippincott Award. Yamashita, who also serves as president of the Joint Council of Librarians of Color, is the first and only Asian American to receive the award to date.

MEET AMERICA'S FAVORITE LIBRARIANS

Why do communities love their librarians? From bringing services outside of the library’s walls to meet patrons where they are to helping families in need access clothes and groceries to teaching critical literacy and research skills, the myriad ways librarians go above and beyond for their communities is an inspiration. In 2022, thousands of library users across the country told us why they love their librarians, and 10 stood out from the crowd. The recipients of the 2023 I Love My Librarian Award are:



I Love My Librarian Honorees

- **Kathryn Blackmer Reyes**, San José State University in San José, California
- **Vikki Brown**, Highlands County Library System in Sebring, Florida
- **Cara Chance**, Lafayette Public Library in Lafayette, Louisiana
- **Tara Coleman**, Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas
- **David Ettinger**, George Mason University in Washington, DC.
- **Julie Marie Frye**, Childs Elementary School in Bloomington, Indiana
- **Lauren Ginsberg DeVilbiss**, P.S. 28 Wright Brothers School in New York City, New York
- **Jamie Gregory**, Christ Church Episcopal School in Greenville, South Carolina
- **Roseanna Gulisano**, P.S. 11 Highbridge School, in Bronx, New York
- **Elacsha Madison**, Evanston Public Library in Evanston, Illinois

“Even in these unprecedented times and as our nation’s library workers face historic levels of intimidation and harassment due to an ongoing wave of book censorship, librarians continue to empower their patrons, teach critical literacy skills, promote inclusion in their space and collections, and provide vital services for their communities.”—ALA President Lessa Kanani’opua Pelayo-Lozada

Chase Ollis is communications manager for the American Library Association

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ABOUT ALA

The American Library Association (ALA) is the foremost national organization providing resources to inspire library and information professionals to transform their communities through essential programs and services. For more than 140 years, ALA has been the trusted voice of libraries, advocating for the profession and the library's role in enhancing learning and ensuring access to information for all. For more information, visit ala.org.



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HOW TO CITE THIS REPORT

American Library Association. The State of America's Libraries 2023: A Report from the American Library Association. 2023.