

## Free Expression Work

Q1 & Q2 2025 (October 1, 2024 – March 31, 2025) Last updated 03/26/25

**Summary:** *American Booksellers for Free Expression (ABFE) focused on educating booksellers and the public about censorship, diversity in literature, and safely creating inclusive community spaces. We were active in 34 states tracking, influencing, or organizing to impact state legislation. We met frequently with allies, one-on-one and in coalition, to coordinate our free expression protections. ABFE had multiple virtual and in-person appearances to provide free expression education to different constituencies including members and allies. A diverse range of booksellers were featured on ABFE social media. We directly supported (at least) 29 bookstores who reached out for advice or support. And we updated our strategic plan, both short-term and long-term, in response to a transformed political landscape.*

### ABA'S FREE EXPRESSION WORK (ABFE)

#### 1st & 2nd Quarters FY 2025

**Coalition work.** ABFE has strengthened our relationships with allies in free expression advocacy and the book world considerably in FY 2025 so far. Multiple meetings individually with groups such as Authors Against Book Bans, National Coalition Against Censorship, the Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA), Penguin Random House, Macmillan, Libro.fm, and Media Coalition helped coordinate our efforts with allies to make them as impactful as possible. Associate Director of ABFE Philomena Polefrone assumed a leadership role in a newly-forming coalition of free expression advocates, shaping the strategy of the coalition, becoming co-chair of the legislative committee, and providing coordination and insight into book ban legislation going into the 2025 legislative session. This led to thrice-weekly meetings with allies and smaller working groups within this coalition. Additionally, ABFE was able to brief our international allies who are beginning to experience some censorship in the American mold.

**Legislative advocacy.** In Q2, ABFE was active on state legislation in 34 states. Actions included: consulting with stakeholders to influence legislation before its introduction; submitting written testimony for bills proactively resisting book bans and against bills that would promote book bans; emailing committee members when written testimony was not an available option, advocating for or against bills on behalf of ABA member stores in the state; keeping booksellers informed with email updates on bills of concern and action items; holding briefings for booksellers and other interested parties; working with booksellers on testimony; and guiding booksellers through in-person and written testimony on bills related to free expression. ABFE was also instrumental in legislative tracking to increase organizing capacity across coalition allies and running legislative working groups to increase awareness and facilitate strategic planning.

**Events and appearances.** The tail end of the tour for the *Right to Read Handbook: Fighting Book Bans and Why It Matters* led to Milwaukee, where Philomena held an event at Lion's Tooth for the Handbook. ABFE was represented at the Heartland Fall Forum, where we were

able to consult with booksellers across the region and understand the region's challenges. Following regional shows, Philomena appeared in online events on several occasions: an internal briefing on October 15 for Macmillan and Bloomsbury employees, appearing opposite Amanda Jones (author of *That Librarian*); an all-member briefing for Authors Against Book Bans on January 17 to talk about effectively collaborating with independent bookstores; and an online meeting for Texas booksellers on February 13. Events and appearances for the review period concluded at Wi2025 in Denver, where Philomena held two education sessions for booksellers: "Content-Based Attacks on Stores," a panel on responding to threats and harassment; and "Speak Out!: Legislative Activism 101," a workshop on preparing testimony for or against state legislation. In March, Philomena held information webinars with: Authors Against Book Bans (New York chapter), on legislation in New York and legislative advocacy strategy; and with PEN America (also featuring a speaker from EveryLibrary), on legislative advocacy.

**Social media.** ABFE social media continued to grow, rising to 1,482 followers. We featured representatives from: The Nonbinarian Bookstore; IBPA; Mosaics Community Bookstore & Venue; the Rutherford County (TN) Library Alliance; The Spine; Judging by the Cover; John Chrastka of EveryLibrary; Harriett's Bookshop/Ida's Bookshop; MahoganyBooks; and more. Additional popular posts included a widespread collaboration with industry allies on a statement objecting to the censorship of recent executive orders; a statement in support of the Palestinian-owned Educational Bookshop in East Jerusalem after they were raided; a post for the 2025 Trans Rights Readathon; and more.

**Direct Support.** ABFE provided direct support to at least 29 bookstores who reached out for help with harassment, threats, intimidation, or a request for information about fighting book bans in their area. This included stores in California, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Washington, DC. The most prevalent reasons for support included harassment due to: carrying Palestinian books; LGBTQIA2S+ books; and anti-racist books.

**Strategic planning.** ABFE spent a significant amount of time in strategic planning to counteract planned and active censorship from the federal government on a range of topics threatening to impact books; equitable policies to ensure speech from a diverse range of speakers is protected at our events and on our institutional channels; our ongoing lawsuits in Texas and Arkansas; making sure booksellers are represented in coalition efforts related to free expression; and more.