

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 17, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth  
Secretary of Defense  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

CC:  
Dr. Beth Schiavino-Narvaez  
Director  
Department of Defense Education Activity  
4800 Mark Center Drive  
Alexandria, VA 22350-1400

Mr. Darin Selnick  
Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness  
U.S. Department of Defense  
4000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-4000

Dear Secretary Hegseth:

We write to express our grave concern about the escalating censorship taking place in schools run by the Department of Defense (DoD). We are demanding that you immediately restore all learning materials and books that have been stripped from the shelves and classrooms run by the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA).

Restricting access to books and reading materials because of their “potential” relation to “gender ideology or discriminatory equity ideology topics” is naked censorship completely at odds not only with the First Amendment but the Trump Administration’s own professed devotion to free speech.<sup>1</sup> You are plainly violating the constitutional rights of DoD families.

DoDEA operates 161 accredited schools and serves more than 67,000 children of active-duty military and DoD civilian families. These schools have provided a world-class education and, by most metrics, exceed nearly all other American public-school systems.<sup>2</sup> An essential element of this exceptional education has been the fostering of critical thinking skills

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/02/07/defense-department-hegseth-books-schools/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dodea.edu/news/press-releases/dod-schools-ranked-best-united-states-nations-report-card>

to “create knowledgeable and engaged citizens who are prepared to participate in democratic society in a global world.”<sup>3</sup>

The First Amendment, of course, protects your right to disagree with what you describe as “gender ideology” and “discriminatory equity ideology,” two “ideologies” which seem to be mostly imaginary. As a citizen, you are free to be for or against MAGA ideology, liberalism, conservatism, techno-libertarianism, critical race theory, Chicago School Economics, queer theory, illiberal democracy, or Christian dominionism.

What the First Amendment does *not* protect are attempts by whichever presidential administration happens to be in power to censor intellectual viewpoints they disagree with. The First Amendment absolutely forbids political “viewpoint discrimination” by government in speech forums and educational contexts. The Supreme Court has struck down the removal of books deemed politically incorrect from school libraries.<sup>4</sup> Our service members risk their lives to protect the constitutional rights of every American. They and their families deserve to exercise the same rights they are working to protect.

We are alarmed by reports that children at DoD schools were prevented from accessing any library books and many learning materials for a week while officials conducted a “review” to identify any books that are related to the mysterious bodies of thought you call “discriminatory equity ideology” or “gender ideology.”

After this week-long review, the nation’s military schools began purging library books and restricting access to books and learning materials that are reportedly undergoing “further review.”<sup>5</sup> Among the books and learning materials that have reportedly been purged are a picture book about Ruth Bader Ginsburg titled *No Truth Without Ruth*, a single chapter on “sexuality and gender” used in Advanced Placement psychology, a reading of “A Nation of Immigrants” in a social studies lesson for fourth-graders, a story about a girl who dislikes her freckles but eventually learns to love them titled *Freckleface Strawberry*, and a book about transgender actor and activist Nicole Maines titled *Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family*.<sup>6</sup> Vice President JD Vance’s book *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* was also targeted for “compliance review” although, as with all the others, it is not entirely clear why.

These Orwellian book purges seriously restrict the spectrum of knowledge and literature available to military families. The stories DoDEA seeks to silence—including apparently the story of our nation’s current Vice President—are the diverse and complex stories of the history and culture of the people of our country. You have no right to erase them.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dodea.edu/education/curriculum-and-instruction>

<sup>4</sup> Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District No. 26 v. Pico, 457 U.S. 853 (1982)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/13/pentagon-schools-closed-libraries-trump>

<sup>6</sup> <https://pen.org/julianne-moore-freckleface-strawberry/>

Our nation’s military schools should be defending, not suppressing, our students’ freedom to think, read, analyze and write independently. And at a time when many transgender youth, children of immigrants, and children from diverse racial backgrounds—all of whom attend DoDEA schools—face relentless bullying and feel isolated and afraid, we are disturbed by the consequences of your attempts to censor books that may resonate with their identities, experiences and contributions to the United States.

We ask that you immediately restore full access to the books and learning materials that you have restricted in DoDEA school libraries and stop any ongoing “reviews” into any other learning materials or school activities that you believe are “potentially related to gender ideology or discriminatory equity ideology topics,” or any other “politically incorrect” ideology.

We ask that you instead uphold DoDEA’s commitment to “educate, engage, and empower military-connected students,” and promote their access to literature and ideas in a way that is as wide-open and robust as our First Amendment. Please allow students in your charge to learn and grow to become independent citizens and critical thinkers in the world’s greatest pluralistic democracy.

Very truly yours,



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Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress



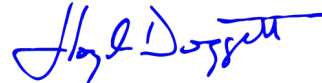
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Chrissy Houlahan  
Member of Congress



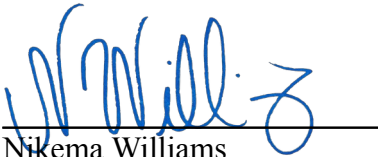
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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



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Lloyd Doggett  
Member of Congress



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Nikema Williams  
Member of Congress



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MARK TAKANO  
Member of Congress



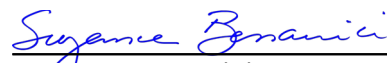
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Member of Congress



Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress



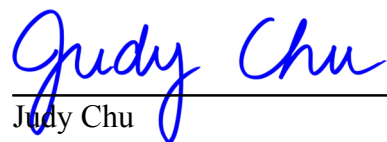
Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress



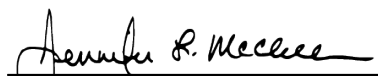
Judy Chu  
Member of Congress



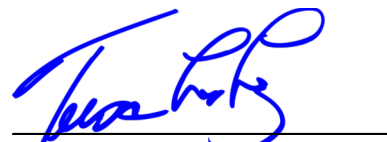
Rick Larsen  
Member of Congress



Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick  
Member of Congress



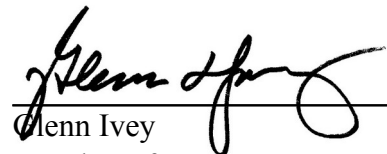
Jennifer L. McClellan  
Member of Congress



Teresa Leger Fernandez  
Member of Congress



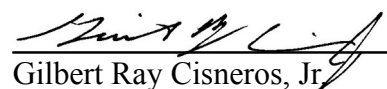
Julia Brownley  
Member of Congress



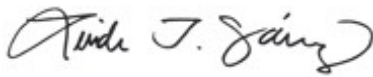
Glenn Ivey  
Member of Congress



Madeleine Dean  
Member of Congress



Gilbert Ray Cisneros, Jr.  
Member of Congress



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Linda T. Sánchez  
Member of Congress



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Jerrold Nadler  
Member of Congress



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Gerald E. Connolly  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on  
Oversight and Government  
Reform



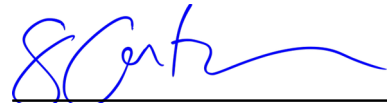
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Al Green  
Member of Congress



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Marilyn Strickland  
Member of Congress



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Sean Casten  
Member of Congress