

# BANNED BOOK LTE & OP-ED GUIDANCE

## WHY SUBMIT AN OPINION EDITORIAL OR LETTER TO THE EDITOR?

Submitting a piece of writing to a local publication is a great way to continue to spread positive messages, influence community decision-making, and share your values with other Alaskans. Elected officials also read local writing to gauge what is important to their constituents. Timing writing with other events, including national recognition days, local public meetings, or decision days, can add extra attention to causes and issues we care about.

## OP- ED VERSUS LTE

**Opinion editorials (op-eds)** are usually longer pieces of writing (600-800 words) written by an expert in their topic and offering new information. **Letters to the editor (LTE's)** are usually shorter (250-400 words) pieces in response to a recent article or editorial that's been published, and can be written by anyone who wishes to express an opinion.

## TALKING POINTS ON BOOK BANNING

- **Efforts to ban books and specific reading material isn't new**, but the American Library Association saw a 70% increase in book ban requests in 2022.
- **4,240 titles were targeted** for book bans in U.S. schools and libraries in 2023 alone.
- **Titles representing the experiences of LGBTQ and people of color made up 47% of attempted book bans** in libraries in 2023.
- **Freedom of expression protects our right to read**, learn and share ideas free from viewpoint-based censorship. The [government/school boards] shouldn't make misguided attempts to suppress that right by banning books.
- **Censoring books by and about people of color and LGBTQ people is discriminatory** and antithetical to our First Amendment rights.
- **All young people deserve the right to read and learn about the history, experiences and viewpoints** of all of our communities in this country. This holds true in school libraries and public libraries too.
- **The First Amendment protects the right to receive and share information and ideas.** This holds true in schools and especially in libraries, which exist to enable people to encounter and explore different ideas, topics, and viewpoints.
- **The library is a place where we are free to encounter and explore new ideas, viewpoints, and to find the things we enjoy reading.** We all have a right to read free from viewpoint-based or partisan censorship.
- **Libraries are an entry point to a whole universe of ideas.** Maintaining the breadth of available books from varying viewpoints and backgrounds is essential to preserving our First Amendment rights to read to receive and share ideas.
- **The books on library shelves don't necessarily reflect the views of the particular school district**– they offer access to the entire spectrum of human knowledge, art, and ideas. Through the library shelves, kids can explore ideas and learn to think for themselves.
- **Limiting the books available in public and school libraries shrinks the world for students** and limits their ability to explore different ideas, viewpoints and topics.
- **Courts have been unfavorable to schools and communities that attempt to ban books.** Book bans that lead to costly litigation divert funds that could be used to better student education and success.

# SAMPLE LTE'S ON BOOK BANNING

## **Book bans are expensive and divisive in the Mat-Su Valley**

We recently saw the lawsuit against the Mat-Su Borough School District for its unconstitutional removal of 56 books in 2023 advanced. The judge told the District it must put the books back on shelves before the start of school in August. While this isn't a final decision in the lawsuit, it's indicative that the court might follow others across the country and decide these bans violate the constitutional rights of students to expression and free speech. Each time districts or boroughs attempt to ban books, they face expensive and time-consuming lawsuits that divert from our schools and public resources that benefit all members of the community. Alaskans should take a look at the book-banning efforts that are popping up across the Mat-Su Valley with their "fiscal conservative" hat on and decide if censorship is really worth it. **(139 words)**

## **Banned Book Week reminds us that censorship doesn't make ideas and people go away**

Banned Book Week is September 22-28, and it represents the value of free and open access to information that we have as a right under the Constitution. Efforts to ban books and specific reading material isn't new, but the American Library Association saw a 70% increase in book ban requests in 2022 - including from our very own Borough School District. While we celebrate the right to read and encounter and explore different ideas, topics, and viewpoints, some of our neighbors work tirelessly to ensure that books they disagree with are removed from shelves. The impact of this cannot be overlooked- they deprive students of access to information that can help them navigate the challenges and nuances of our world and history. Banning books that illuminate the experiences of LGBTQ and people of color removes representation that young people deserve to see in literature. It attempts to erase people and ideas that are different from the public. Despite the efforts to ban differences, we celebrate them, and their role in literature during Banned Book Week. I hope you'll join me in picking up a book that you maybe wouldn't read usually and opening your mind to something new. **(198 words)**

## HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR LTE?

Submit in the publication closest to where you live and check submission and word count requirements before you submit.

[Anchorage- Anchorage Daily News](#)

[Fairbanks- Fairbanks Daily News Miner](#)

[Mat-Su Valley- Mat-Su Frontiersman](#)

[Ketchikan- Ketchikan Daily News](#)

[Juneau- Juneau Empire](#)

[Kodiak- Kodiak Daily Mirror](#)

[Kenai Peninsula- Peninsula Clarion](#)

**NEED ASSISTANCE?** Contact Jordyn Chabotte, Mat-Su Organizer, at [jchabotte@acluak.org](mailto:jchabotte@acluak.org)