



August 14, 2025

The Honourable Demetrios Nicolaides
Minister of Education and Childcare
228 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6
Via email: education.minister@gov.ab.ca

Dear Minister Nicolaides,

Re: Book Banning in Alberta's School Libraries and CCLA's Response to Your Open-Letter of August 9, 2025

We are writing in response to the [op-ed](#) you published on August 9, 2025 in the Edmonton Journal. Your op-ed addresses [CCLA's own op-ed](#) published on July 29, 2025 in the same newspaper.

The CCLA fully acknowledges that you and the government you are part of are closer to the people of Alberta than national organizations such as ours can be. We are, however, concerned by your limited acknowledgement of the values that define civil liberties and the principles behind freedom of speech that include the ability to publish, read and view content free of government censorship.

In your op-ed, you argue that by labelling your July 4 [ministerial order](#) as a "book ban," the CCLA "completely mischaracterized the new school library book policy recently announced" by the government of Alberta. In your opinion, this order "was never about banning books", as "the government has no will, want or ability to ban books."

It was, and continues to be, our opinion that this ministerial order amounts to book-banning, a particularly harmful form of censorship.

You also accuse the CCLA of making a "completely false and shockingly deceptive claim" by stating that George Orwell's 1984 and Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale will be banned from school libraries as a result of your order. Yet, these two books include explicit—and sometimes quite graphic—references to sexual intercourse, masturbation, and rape. Is your point that these depictions are not clear or detailed enough, making them "non-explicit sexual content" that should only be banned below Grade 10 as per your ministerial order?

The lack of clarity begs a question: How will the school boards know where to draw the line? And how can you be so sure that they will all draw it in the same place? Based on the wording of your order, there is good reason to fear that many thought-provoking and critically acclaimed books will be banned from school libraries because they depict content that *could* be considered "explicit sexual content." You indeed seem to be well aware of this risk, as you acknowledged in the press conference you gave on July 10 that your ministerial order "undoubtedly" left "some grey areas."

In the same July 10 press conference, you indicated that the order's spirit or intent is not to ban books that do not contain really graphic sexual content. We hope that is the case, but, press

conferences and op-eds are not legally binding; ministerial orders are. If your government's intent is more limited than stated in your order, we suggest you amend the order accordingly. School boards, librarians, students and parents deserve a more reliable, transparent and accountable regime than the one your order creates. It would be even better if your government presented its plans for limiting access to books in school in the legislature to guarantee transparency and public debate.

In your op-ed, you further state that "materials selected and used by a teacher to support curricular outcomes are not affected" by the July 4 ministerial order (something the CCLA never questioned) and you add that your government "trust[s] the teachers and educators in our school system to teach a well-rounded, age-appropriate sex-ed curriculum." We wonder how this assertion aligns with your government's recent amendments to Alberta's *Education Act* which provide that, as of September 2025, a school board "shall not use or permit the use or provision of learning and teaching resources that deal primarily and explicitly with gender identity, sexual orientation or human sexuality unless the learning and teaching resources are approved by the Minister [of Education and Childcare]."¹

Finally, we must address your question about our stance on allowing explicit sexual content in school libraries. Clearly, not all sexual content is appropriate for students of every age—that is between 6 and 18 years old. As already stated in our op-ed, while "reflecting on the effects of youth's exposure to sexual content is an important endeavour," "[t]his type of exercise should be left to librarians, educators, parents, and, to some extent, students themselves, while bearing in mind that schools and libraries exist to promote dialogue and critical thought for learners of all ages." Broad standardized government prohibitions such as your ministerial order end this vital conversation before it even begins, just like banning a book based on a few excerpts ignores all the other valuable lessons that students could have learned from reading it.

The CCLA will continue to fulfill its mandate of acting as a watchdog for civil liberties in Canada. This includes calling out the government when we believe it is censoring expression and learning. Albertans, like their government, are free to agree or disagree with our viewpoints. This is precisely what a vibrant and functioning democracy needs: an ability to express opinions, challenge the status quo, respectfully debate competing views, and have access to challenging information that helps people learn and grow.

Sincerely,



Howard Sapers
Executive Director
Canadian Civil Liberties Association



Ana s Bussi res McNicoll
Director, Fundamental Freedoms
Canadian Civil Liberties Association

¹ Education Act, SA 2012, c E-0.3, s 18.1(2).