

ACLU has warning on book bans at Michigan schools

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Detroit Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

As book-banning debates continue to take the stage and the election nears, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) wrote a letter to Michigan school districts encouraging them to protect students’ First Amendment rights.

“In addition to threatening the First Amendment rights of all students, this wave of book-banning is an attack on LGBTQ+ children and their families, and it must be stopped,” said Jay Kaplan, ACLU of Michigan LGBTQ+ Rights Project staff attorney, in a Tuesday news release. “For countless youth who face bullying, isolation, and depression, access to LGBTQ+ representation or information in books and literature can be a refuge — and in some cases lifesaving. School libraries are places where young people should be able to learn about themselves and people who are different from themselves, not denied access to the diverse perspectives that books and literature offer us all.”

In the past, book banning focused on themes including race, gender, and sexuality. The bans can further marginalize underrepresented communities, critics say.

Proponents of the bans are saying the books contain content they deem inappropriate, citing the emotional and social toll such topics have on their children.

Dearborn in particular is in the national spotlight as candidates and protesters voice their support for and against banning books focusing on LGBTQ+ characters. At some school board meetings, LGBTQ+ public com-



Counter-protestors Nathan Garish (left) and Sam Smalley (right) speak over demonstrators who support banning books as they protest outside of the Henry Ford Centennial Library in Dearborn, Michigan, on September 25. The protests emerged after Dearborn Public Schools temporarily restricted access to seven books following a parent's complaint about their content. They also restricted access to an e-book app featuring thousands of titles. JEFF KOWALSKY/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

menters have been booed by a large crowd.

Jamestown Township, located near Grand Rapids, made headlines after voters defunded the library because of its LGBTQ+ collection. The millage is on the ballot again on Nov. 8.

The letter is being sent to hundreds of superintendents and school board presidents, according to the news release, and it warns that restricting access to diverse books can threaten democracy.

“In debating whether to allow students to check out a controversial book from the school library, it is easy to lose sight of the overarching function of our schools: to train young people to think for themselves,” the letter reads. “When school officials attempt to create a ‘sanitized’ learning space by eliminating controversial texts from school libraries, they undermine this critical function of public education.

“In the end, schools become another arena for political warfare, rather than a

space of learning for our youth. Neither students nor their communities are well served by this practice. Accordingly, we are asking superintendents and school boards throughout the state to take a stand against censorship, and in support of the rights and interests of your students and our democracy. We urge you to resist any attempts to remove books from your school libraries — and if books have been banned in your district, to restore students’ access to all censored materials as soon as possible.”

Twitter layoffs begin a week after Musk takes over company

ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK – Twitter began widespread layoffs Friday as new owner Elon Musk overhauls the social platform.

The company had told employees by email that they would find out by noon Eastern time if they had been laid off. The email did not say how many of the roughly 7,500 employees would lose their jobs.

Musk didn’t confirm or correct investor Ron Baron at a conference in New York on Friday when he asked the billionaire Tesla CEO how much money he would save after he “fired half of Twitter.”

Musk, speaking at Baron’s annual investment conference, responded by talking about Twitter’s ongoing cost and revenue challenges and blamed activists who this week called on big companies to halt advertising on the platform. Musk hasn’t commented on the layoffs themselves.

“The activist groups have been successful in causing a massive drop in Twitter advertising revenue, and we’ve done our absolute best to appease them and nothing is working,” Musk said.

Some employees of the San Francisco-based company tweeted earlier that they had already lost access to their work accounts. They and others tweeted messages of support using the hashtag #OneTeam. The email to staff said job reductions were “necessary to ensure the company’s success moving forward.”


Twitter’s employees have been expecting layoffs since Musk took the helm of the company. Already, he has fired top executives, including CEO Parag Agrawal, on his first day as Twitter’s owner.

Musk also had removed the company’s board of directors and installed himself as the sole board member. On Thursday night, many Twitter employees took to the platform to express sup-

port for each other – often simply tweeting blue heart emojis to signify Twitter’s blue bird logo – and salute emojis in replies to each other.

As of Friday, Musk and Twitter had given no public notice of the coming layoffs, according to a spokesperson for California’s Employment Development

Department. That’s even though the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification statute requires employers with at least 100 workers to disclose layoffs involving 500 or more employees, regardless of whether a company is publicly traded or privately held.



EPA Issues Cleanup Decision PMC Groundwater Site Petoskey, Michigan

In September 2022, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued a cleanup plan called a Record of Decision (ROD) to clean up groundwater, soil, and soil vapor contamination at the PMC Groundwater site. The selected cleanup will address the volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, found in the groundwater and soil on-site and will be protective of human health. VOCs are a group of chemicals that often turn to gas, or vapor, when exposed to air. These vapors can get into buildings through cracks in foundations or other ways and can contaminate indoor air. This process is called vapor intrusion. The cleanup includes:

- Installing vapor mitigation systems in buildings, as needed, based on future sampling.
- Conducting additional sampling of soil, soil vapor and groundwater to gather the information for the design phase of the cleanup.
- Using technologies called air sparging and soil vapor extraction, or SVE. Air sparging involves pumping air into the contaminated groundwater and exposing it to air turning the contaminants into vapor and capturing them with the SVE system. SVE is a system of wells that pump the vapors out of the ground for treatment. The SVE will also remove contaminants out of the soil.
- Monitoring groundwater and soil vapor to ensure the cleanup is working.
- Installing signs and fencing to protect people during construction and, if needed, during cleanup.

The estimated cost of the cleanup is \$5.5 million.

You can read the 2022 Record of Decision at the EPA website for this cleanup site: www.epa.gov/superfund/pmc-groundwater.

The 2022 Record of Decision and other site-related documents will also be available at the Petoskey District Library, 500 E. Mitchell St., Petoskey, MI 49770.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Ruth Muhtsun, EPA Community Involvement Coordinator, at (312) 886-6595 or muhtsun.ruth@epa.gov.



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