

Free Speech Needs Free Libraries: A Joint Statement

This statement was developed through a collaboration of library consortium executive directors across the United States in response to growing threats to academic freedom and freedom of inquiry experienced by library users in many states.

Our goal with this statement is to affirm the central role of libraries in protecting everyone's freedom to read, learn, and exchange ideas—principles that lie at the heart of our member institutions' missions.

We hope the statement will help to collectively and individually ground libraries as they work in their local contexts, providing a timely and authoritative articulation of our shared values. As challenges mount—ranging from pressures on collection development policies, to censorship, to restrictions on access to research—our collective ecosystem is increasingly affected, making it vital to speak with a strong, united voice.

As important as this grounding is, we realize that statements alone will not suffice in this moment. We look forward to facilitating conversations within our communities to share ideas and identify actions that we can take to proactively preserve our libraries and protect the free inquiry and speech of those who use them.

If your organization would like to share the ideas in this statement, please feel free to take it, revise it if needed, and use it within your communities. The statement is issued under a Creative Commons Attribution license by CARLI, Orbis Cascade, and PALCI.

Free Speech Needs Free Libraries

A Joint Statement of the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI), Orbis Cascade Alliance, and Partnership for Academic Library Collaboration & Innovation (PALCI)

Approved October 2025 by the CARLI, Orbis Cascade, and PALCI Boards of Directors

Every day, millions of Americans in every state rely on their academic, public, or school libraries to exercise their freedoms of inquiry and expression—using their library of choice to expand their knowledge and to advance their educational pursuits, employment opportunities, and engagement in civic life. Free access to information, long preserved through American jurisprudence, is a critical part of Americans’ Constitutional right to freedom of speech—and this access through libraries has created generations of knowledgeable civic leaders, educators, scientists, and entrepreneurs. Indeed, throughout our nation’s history, the information available through libraries has served as a powerful differentiator, inspiring the ingenuity and creativity that has made the United States the envy of the world.

Recognizing this important role that libraries play in fostering engaged citizens, as leaders of library consortia with direct knowledge of the positive impact our hundreds of member libraries have on their communities, **we stand firmly in support of every person’s right to read, learn, and exchange ideas without interference—and we call on federal, state, and local leaders and policymakers to join us in affirming this right by preserving the integrity of our libraries.**

We are compelled to issue this call as we witness libraries’ role in equipping Americans to learn and to exercise their freedom of speech increasingly threatened. A growing number of state and federal actions have directly or indirectly restricted libraries’ local decision-making and limited their ability to offer the books, ebooks, scholarly journals, and research databases their communities need to thrive. Legislative, executive, and regulatory measures—especially those that limit access to certain information or otherwise constrain libraries’ ability to build collections to serve their communities—are eroding the freedoms that have long defined our country’s education, innovation, and democracy.

Governmental efforts to restrict access to information work against **a goal we share with our political leaders: to ensure our communities have access to accurate, reliable information.** In an era when inaccurate and biased information is easily circulated online and through social media, libraries offer a trusted alternative through their collections and information literacy education. While this does not mean that our community members will agree with everything libraries provide, it does mean that they can be assured that the library has taken every reasonable measure to ensure they are providing access to high quality, relevant information thoughtfully curated to represent a broad range of perspectives that support learning and inquiry.

When libraries are forced to restrict topics, access to information, and perspectives, it deprives every community member of the chance to seek truth, test ideas, and build understanding. To give all Americans that chance—whether through formal study or self-directed learning—we must maintain access to comprehensive library collections. We commend emerging efforts across the country to enact legislation that proactively protects the First Amendment and the freedom to read, and that recognizes libraries as trusted community partners in creating learning opportunities for all people. Whether through advocacy or legislation, **we strongly urge community and government leaders to continue to recognize and protect librarians’ professional discretion, in order to ensure that American libraries remain a hallmark of our civic society and Constitutional democracy.**

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Pronouns: she/her/hers

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