

Free Expression Work

Q1 FY2026 (October 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025) Last updated 12/19/25

Summary:

ABA's FREE EXPRESSION WORK (ABFE)

1st Quarter FY 2026

Summary.

Education. Q1 began with a cluster of education events due to the overlap of Banned Books Week and regional trade shows. On October 6, 2025, ABFE appeared at a Right to Read rally with headliner George Takei at the Brooklyn Public Library, shortly after joining a webinar panel hosted by Unite Against Book Bans to discuss using policy as an advocacy tool in bookstores and libraries. Additional education events included presenting “Navigating Attacks on your Store” at the MPIBA (Oct. 8) and Heartland (Oct. 15) fall shows, joining a panel on combatting book censorship at Heartland (Oct. 15), speaking on Publishing Professionals Against Book Bans’ (PPABB) inaugural town hall webinar alongside author Angie Thomas (Oct. 28). We also began planning 2026 education events, including two events at Winter Institute 2026, One at Children’s Institute 2026, a webinar with PPABB, and proposals for additional webinars to be announced.

Communications. We began work on the toolkit to follow our “Navigating Attacks on Your Store” education sessions as presented at regional trade shows, completing a checklist that will be developed into a full toolkit in Q2. Our Instagram following grew to 2,186 from seven posts. We kept booksellers in New York, Massachusetts, Tennessee, and more updated with emails detailing how they can take action and provided action-focused updates weekly in *Bookselling This Week’s* Advocacy Updates. We additionally signed and/or helped author two open letters objecting to censorship targeting LGBTQ+ books in Tennessee and Alabama.

Organizing. ABFE’s Associate Director continued to co-chair a legislative working group to coordinate, monitor, and develop strategy for bills across the country. Focus in Q1 remained on Massachusetts, where ABFE coordinated with the Mass Freedom to Read coalition to support the passage of a landmark freedom to read bill. We also supported the freedom to read bill in New York, S 1099, organizing a rally with NYCLU, PEN America, and Authors Against Book Bans New York to encourage Gov. Hochul’s signature. We briefed booksellers and allies on significant pre-filed bills for the 2026 session and began updating the tracker shared with our allies. Finally, we made an early intervention with the help of a bookseller in New Hampshire SB 648, a pre-filed bill that could incentivize frivolous lawsuits.

Legal. ABA’s free expression legal strategy primarily included our ongoing lawsuits against book ban bills in Texas and Arkansas, which remain in a holding pattern. We joined an amicus brief in *Spectrum WT v. Wendler*, a Texas case being heard en banc in the Fifth Circuit Appellate Court challenging the President of West Texas A&M’s decision to ban a drag performance on campus, citing Title IX. The brief argues it is unconstitutional prior restraint,

and ABA joins to protect precedent and in recognition of stores holding Drag Story Time events.

Coalition work. ABFE continued to play a leadership role in coalitions, assisting in organizing, presenting at, and attending coalition town halls, legislative working group meetings, steering committing meetings, and an in-person summit in New York. We assisted in long-term strategic planning as well as short-term rapid response for emergent censorship problems.

Direct Support. ABFE responded to numerous requests for store support this quarter. Incidents primarily centered on books and events related to global politics, LGBTQ+ books, and objection to discussion of book bans.