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Military Brats Slap Pete Hegseth With a Lawsuit Over Book Removals

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Twelve students are suing the defense secretary for removing nearly 400 books from their Pentagon school library.



Tom Sanders
Reporter

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Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth is being sued by 12 students over the removal books on race and gender from Pentagon schools following an executive order from President Donald Trump.

The lawsuit, filed on the students’ behalf by the American Civil Liberties Union, alleges that their First Amendment rights are being infringed by the decision, which they argue places children in danger by depriving them of important information about health, hygiene, biology, and abuse.

Emerson Sykes, ACLU’s lead counsel in the case, said in a filing: “The quality of children’s education, their exposure to ideas and the preparing of citizens in the next generation are all being harmed by this censorship.”

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“This is not how public schools are supposed to work—students have a right to learn and to access information that should be above the political fray.”

The plaintiffs attend schools run by the Defense Department both in the U.S. and overseas, which are classified as civilian schools and subject to First Amendment rights. The 12 children belong to five families of active duty personnel based in the U.S., Italy, and Japan, with their ages ranging from pre-kindergarten to high school.

The Department of Defense Education Activity serves about 67,000 children of both active-duty and civilian personnel in the U.S. military around the world.

Since taking office, Trump has signed a number of executive orders aimed at dismantling diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, which have been aggressively pursued by Hegseth at the Department of Defense.

The defense secretary has used two in particular, [Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism](#) and [Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling](#), to purge nearly 400 books from the Naval Academy Library and enforce Trump anti-DEI policies at other Pentagon schools.

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Joey McFadden



Included in the purge was Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and Janet Jacobs’ *Memorializing the Holocaust*, which

examines the way in which female victims of Nazi Germany are remembered, The New York Times reports.

Linda Gordon’s *The Second Coming of the KKK* was also removed, but Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* was not, and neither was *The Bell Curve*, which claims Black people are genetically less intelligent than white people. (A critique of the book was among the banned texts.)

250404-LIST OF REMOVED BOOKS FROM NIMITZ LIBRARY

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In Japan, the award-winning *Queer History of the United States* was pulled from school shelves, despite it being a core text in AP Psychology courses, while in Italy a children’s book titled *Julian Is a Mermaid* was among 25 titles removed by the DoD.

“By quarantining library books and whitewashing curricula in its civilian schools, the Department of Defense Education Activity is violating students’ First Amendment rights,” Matt Callahan, senior supervising attorney at the ACLU of Virginia, said in an [ACLU press release](#). “The government can’t scrub references to race and gender from public school libraries and classrooms just because the Trump administration doesn’t like certain viewpoints on those topics.”



Two of Hegseth’s top staff have been placed on administrative leave.

Kiyoshi Ota/Pool - Getty Images

Corey Shapiro, legal director for the ACLU of Kentucky, added in the release: “Our clients have a right to receive an education that includes an open and honest dialogue about America’s history. Censoring books and canceling assignments about the contributions of Black Americans is not only wrong, but antithetical to our First Amendment rights.”

In addition to Hegseth, Beth Schiavino-Narvaez, the head of the Pentagon school system, has been named as a defendant in the

The Department of Defense declined to comment to the Daily Beast, saying it does not comment on ongoing litigation. The Daily Beast has reached out to Hegseth’s attorney for comment.

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