

## **“Action Guide” for History Censorship**

*How should history organizations respond to educational censorship?*

### **NOTE**

This preliminary draft recommends possible actions history organizations and practitioners can take to oppose efforts to censor history. However, this list is not comprehensive. We are eager to learn from AASLH members and others about other actions that should be included in the final version of this guide. *How can history organizations support schools and educators in their efforts to provide students with a full and honest view of history? How can we, as institutions and individuals, advocate against efforts to censor history?*

Please provide feedback at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HistoryCensorship>.

Over the past few years, history education has been contested and weaponized in the political sphere in new ways and with great intensity. Across the nation, state legislatures have enacted a range of censorship measures that restrict honest, accurate, and inclusive examinations of American history. This censorship effort has had a chilling effect among educators, creating a climate of fear and caution that may severely limit students’ ability to fully explore American history.

As history organizations, we must consider how to advocate for historical honesty in schools and beyond, support our classroom teachers and students, center censored histories in our own organizations, and expand our organizational reach, using our unique access to primary sources, historic places, and perspectives to do this work.

The steps below offer a preliminary framework for planning your institution’s actions. AASLH is relying on our members, colleagues, and others across the country to help us improve upon, expand, and finalize the ideas below, and we look forward to hearing from you.

### **What can you do?**

1. **Find out what’s happening in your state or other states.**
2. **Talk to your Board and staff about educational censorship laws.**
3. **Draft a public statement opposing classroom censorship.**
4. **Make your position public.**
5. **Leverage your institution’s resources to offer other forms of assistance.**
6. **Tell AASLH what you need from us.**

### STEP 1: Find out what's happening in your state or other states.

[PEN America](#), a nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection of free expression, offers the most comprehensive source of information. You can find their resources, including an index of legislative efforts, here: <https://pen.org/issue/educational-censorship>

### STEP 2: Talk to your Board and staff about educational censorship laws.

- Meet with your staff about the classroom censorship laws in your state. Bring everyone up to speed on the issue and discuss an organizational response (a public statement, new outreach programming, a new exhibition, etc.)
- Talk to your Board about putting out a statement against classroom censorship. While the statement may cause a stir, it will also call needed attention to a pressing issue pertinent to your organization's mission.

### STEP 3: Draft a public statement opposing classroom censorship.

- Observe which other organizations in your state or community are taking stances on censorship. Consider which of them have compatible missions to your own and would be good advocacy partners. Place to look include state and local affiliates of the ACLU, NAACP Legal Defense Fund, education policy organizations, and others.
- Draw on the talking points below to draft a public statement opposing classroom censorship and white-washed history education. These talking points build on findings from AASLH's "Reframing History" project, along with other research. When used consistently, these ideas resonate with Americans across the political spectrum. Whenever possible, messages should draw on **concrete, local examples**.
- Talking point highlights: By not allowing students to deeply engage with history's full richness and complexity, **these bills:**
  - *Deny students the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills.* History education helps students learn how to compare differing perspectives, evaluate evidence and arguments, and draw conclusions about the significance of complex events and trends from our past. By having elected officials determine what concepts from history are allowed to be discussed in the classroom, we prevent students from learning skills they need to participate in the workforce, in their communities, and in our nation's civic life.
  - *Hold back society's progress.* Learning from our past, both our successes and our mistakes, helps us make progress towards a more just society. The thorough and accurate history education schools strive to provide to students helps them reject racism and to understand and respect the equal humanity and dignity of every person. Students cannot gain this crucial perspective without a forthright engagement with detailed, evidence-based histories.
  - *Go against the wishes of most parents, teachers, students.* Research from the American Historical Association, Pew Research Center, and others shows that the majority of Americans and parents believe classrooms should explore history's full complexity, in alignment with their state's education standards. Most parents trust educators to teach the hard parts of history in an age-appropriate and thorough manner, but censorship bills take choices about classroom content out of the hands of teachers, school districts, and curriculum experts and spread a climate of fear and uncertainty among educators.

### STEP 4: Publish and mail your statement.

- Where to publish: On your website, in a newsletter, as an op-ed in a local newspaper

- Where to mail: to your local representatives, organization members, school board

#### **STEP 5: Leverage your institution's resources to offer other forms of assistance.**

History museums and related institutions are uniquely positioned to share a message about the importance of honest and accurate history in a wide range of different ways. Some examples include:

- Host a town hall on educational censorship for your audience, including the voices of teachers, students, parents, and others.
- Draw on [Reframing History](#) to develop programs or online resources that help explain what history is, how we know what we know, and why our understanding can change over time.
- Offer workshops and programs for teachers and students that draw on local history, objects, and perspectives to offer an honest, evidence-based historical narrative.
- Seek opportunities to engage respectfully with sponsors of censorship legislation and policies. Be willing to engage in dialog.
- Observe, learn from, and partner with other organizations. This can include local groups modeling constructive dialogue around difficult issues or well-organized advocates in other states.

#### **STEP 6: Tell AASLH what you need from us.**

The steps above are just initial recommendations. We hope to hear from you about how we can improve the recommendations above, or what other kinds of resources and tools AASLH can provide to encourage action around this issue.

Please send us your ideas here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HistoryCensorship>