# Federal Appeals Courts Address LGBTQ+ Rights in School Settings



### Federal Appeals Court Examines Iowa Book Ban

A federal appeals court heard arguments challenging an Iowa law that bans books depicting sex acts from school libraries and classrooms. Advocates for LGBTQ+ youth, teachers, and major publishers seek to affirm a lower court's order blocking key parts of the law. The Iowa law, enacted in 2023 by the Republican-led Legislature and Governor Kim Reynolds, prohibits books showing sex acts and restricts discussions on gender identity and sexual orientation for younger students.

The law resulted in the removal of hundreds of books from Iowa schools until U.S. District Judge Stephen Locher blocked its enforcement in December. Attorneys argued before a three-judge panel of the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Paul, Minnesota, that the law censors LGBTQ+ content and suppresses free expression. Iowa's legal team maintains the law is constitutional, citing a state interest in protecting minors from inappropriate content.

Represented by the ACLU of Iowa and Lambda Legal, Iowa Safe Schools and seven students initiated the lawsuit, joined by the Iowa State Education Association, publisher Penguin Random House, and four authors. The state argues the law pertains to government speech in public libraries and that plaintiffs lack standing to challenge it, as it does not directly target students.

The appeals court has taken the case under advisement, with no specified timeline for a decision.

### Court Upholds School's Ban on Gender-Identity T-Shirt

A federal appeals court upheld a Middleborough school’s decision to prevent a student from wearing a T-shirt with the phrase “There are only two genders,” citing it violated the school’s dress code against hate speech. A decision authored by Chief Judge David J. Barron of the First Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the school’s actions to protect LGBTQ+ students from psychological harm.

The case involved seventh grader Liam Morrison, who wore the T-shirt to John T. Nichols Jr. Middle School in March 2023. After refusing to change the shirt at the administrators' request, Morrison was sent home but not punished. Supported by the Alliance Defending Freedom and the Massachusetts Family Institute, Morrison challenged the school's decision.

Middleborough School Superintendent Carolyn Lyons welcomed the ruling, emphasizing the need for a respectful learning environment. The court found the message on the T-shirt disrupted the educational atmosphere, thereby justifying the school's decision under First Amendment law.

Alliance Defending Freedom criticized the ruling as a suppression of free speech and is considering further legal actions.