

Colorado Public Library Challenges to Materials and Services: 2022

Every year, Library Research Service surveys Colorado public libraries about challenges to their materials or services as part of the Public Library Annual Report survey (PLAR.) The libraries that report receiving one or more challenges are then asked to provide additional information. A challenge is an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based on the objections of a person or group (www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport). Note that reporting details about challenges is optional, so the numbers do not necessarily cover all challenges reported on the PLAR survey. In 2022 there were 120 challenges. That's a 500% increase from 2021.

This graph shows the number of challenges over 10 years as reported on the PLAR. Until 2022, the number of challenges in Colorado has remained below 45 each year. In 2022, some libraries expressed that they had their first challenges in a decade. Out of the 21 libraries who reported challenges, four of them account for the vast majority of challenges (77 of the 120). Most (15) of the 21 libraries had four or fewer challenges to report. According to the American Library Association, nationally 1,269 challenges were reported in 2022. Notably, this is about a 74% increase from 2021, compared to Colorado's 500% increase.

This chart shows the reasons for challenges in 2022. "LGBTQIA+" was the most common reason for a challenge with "Unsuited to Age Group" a close second. "Other" included topics such as outdated information, and child/physical human development. The most commonly challenged book was "Gender Queer" by Maia Kobabe with 11 challenges, and the most frequently challenged material or services overall was Drag Queen Story

Hour with 38 challenges reported. Keep in mind that multiple reasons could be selected for each individual challenge, so it's likely that there is crossover between reasons. The categories for reasons and their frequency are: LGBTQIA+ 83%, Unsuitable to age group 79%, Political viewpoint 65%, Religious viewpoint 65%, Anti-family 56%, Insensitivity 23%, Sex Education 16%, Nudity 15%, Offensive language 5%, Anti-Ethnic 4%, Drugs 3%, Occult/Satanism 1%, Sexism 1%, and Other 3%.

This pie chart shows the format of challenged items. The formats and their percentage of occurrence is: Book (print) 53%, Activity 44%, and Movie 3%. For our purposes, "Activity" includes programs, events, and displays. All of the activities that were challenged were about LGBTQIA+ topics; Drag Queen Story Hour, and Pride Display. There were not any material challenges for audiobooks, eAudiobooks, eBooks, music, nor newspapers/magazines. There were also no internet policy challenges reported. The materials challenges were composed of 37 unique titles compared to 15 in 2021.

70% of challenges were regarding items or activities intended for children with only 10% intended for adults and 20% for young adults. The results of the challenges are as follows: In 11% of challenges the item was moved, in 88% no change occurred, and in 1% a policy was updated. The vast majority of challenges resulted in no change but 1% did spur a policy update.

If you'd like to learn more or see a full list of challenged titles and services, please visit <https://www.lrs.org/public/data/challenges/>. Questions or concerns? Contact lrs@lrs.org. Please note that this report was originally published 7/20/23 and revised in November 29, 2023. This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.