



ALBERTA COUNSEL

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TURNING THE PAGE: ALBERTA'S NEW SCHOOL LIBRARY STANDARDS

Aileen Burke

On July 10, 2025, Alberta's Ministry of Education and Childcare enacted Ministerial Order 30/2025, a sweeping directive establishing province-wide standards for the selection, availability, and access of school library materials. This Order, binding on all school authorities, comes in response to the results of the School Library Standards Engagement Survey—particularly those deemed sexually explicit or age-inappropriate—within K–12 libraries across the province.

The Ministerial Order is both a policy statement and a regulatory framework. It mandates the development and enforcement of content selection procedures, parental notification systems, and cataloguing transparency measures. Taken together, these measures represent a significant shift in the relationship among school libraries, families, and provincial oversight.

Definitions That Matter

The Order outlines key definitions to execute the Standards. Key definitions to be aware of include:

- **Depiction:** Means a written passage, illustration, photographic or digital image, video or audio file.
- **Explicit Sexual Content:** Means content containing a detailed and clear depiction of a sexual act, but does not include non-sexual content, non-explicit sexual content, or any depiction of any nature contained in religious texts or scriptures.
- **Non-explicit Sexual Content:** Means content containing a depiction of a sexual act that is not detailed or clear but does not include non-sexual content or any depiction of any nature contained in religious texts or scriptures.
- **Non-sexual Content:** Means content that is not sexual in nature and includes but is not limited to depictions of bodies, body parts, or physical contact related to medical conditions, examinations, or treatment, related to biological functions, depiction in an informative, not narrative, manner, kissing or handholding, or indirect references to sexual acts.

Core Requirements of the Ministerial Order

At its core, the Order lays out a multi-tiered standard for school boards and education authorities. Key elements include:

- **Selection and Evaluation Criteria:** All materials must be assessed for their educational relevance, developmental appropriateness, and alignment with curriculum objectives. Evaluation must include consideration of language, themes, and depictions of sexuality or violence. Notably, the Order mandates that:
 - o Bans all materials containing explicit sexual content
 - o No child or student below grade 10 has access to materials containing non-explicit sexual content
 - o School authorities may permit students in grade or above to access materials that contain non-explicit sexual content if such content is developmentally appropriate
 - o Schools review their collections of materials continuously to ensure compliance
 - o Schools establish and maintain a publicly available listing of all materials
 - o A staff member must supervise the access of all materials to ensure appropriate access
 - o In the case where, during the school day, a student may have access to materials outside of the school library, a staff member must supervise such access to ensure that students do not access materials that they would not otherwise have access to in the school library
- **Parental Rights and Opt-Out Mechanisms:** Schools must notify parents when materials with sexual content are added to the library. Parents have the right to limit their child's access to such content.
- **Transparent Cataloguing:** School authorities are required to maintain accessible, categorized records of all library holdings. Books flagged for sexual or sensitive content must be identified with standardized age-appropriateness markers.
- **Inclusive Selection Policies and/or Procedures:** School authorities are required to have publicly available policies



AILEEN BURKE

Director- Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector (NPVS)

Aileen holds an MA in Political Science and has been a part of creating and adapting policy and procedure, complex problem solving, and has significant knowledge of the non-profit industry and municipal politics. Aileen has run for all levels of government and has significant experience working on election campaigns.

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and/or procedures relating to the selection, availability, and access of school library materials that comply with the standards laid out in the Order no later than January 1, 2026. These processes must include a mechanism through which students, school employees, parents, the school council, or community members with a direct connection to the school can request that the school authority review, change access to, reconsider or remove specific school library materials.

The Order also allows the Minister to issue guidelines and directives as necessary to ensure compliance and consistency across jurisdictions. School authorities will be required to report annually on their adherence to these standards.

Implementation Roadmap

The Department of Education and Childcare has indicated that implementation will be phased in throughout the 2025–2026 academic year. School authorities will receive detailed selection guidelines in the fall of 2025, alongside templates for cataloging, age rating, and parental notification.

Authorities are expected to submit annual compliance reports beginning in 2026, which may be used to assess system-wide adherence. The Minister retains the authority to conduct reviews or issue further directives where necessary.

Public Engagement: Nearly 80,000 Respondents

Ministerial Order 30/2025 was informed by an extraordinary level of public engagement. In May and June 2025, the Government of Alberta conducted a province-wide online survey to solicit feedback from parents, educators, and community members. The response was overwhelming: over 196,000 Albertans began the study, and 77,395 completed responses were deemed valid.

Though 61% of respondents said they have never been concerned about a book in a school library being inappropriate for a specific age group due to sexually explicit content, the survey results revealed clear trends:

- 42% of respondents stated that students should never have access to sexually explicit content in school libraries.
- 94% agreed that elementary school students (under age 12) should not access such content.
- A majority emphasized the importance of parental oversight, with 62% supporting a parent-driven complaint process.
- Respondents indicated the highest levels of trust in teachers, librarians, and parents to make decisions about age-appropriateness, while expressing lower trust in government or political decision-makers.

The Political Landscape

The release of Ministerial Order 30/2025 reflects the current Alberta government's broader emphasis on parental rights, transparency in education, and safeguards against ideological exposure in schools.

In announcing the policy, Education Minister Demetrios Nicolaidis stated that the Order “strikes the right balance between giving students access to quality materials while respecting the role of parents and the maturity level of children.” The Department has positioned the Order as a protective measure—not a restriction on knowledge—but rather, an assurance that library content will reflect community standards and age-appropriate pedagogy.

Alberta's framework is unique in its attempt to codify detailed implementation procedures through a Ministerial Order, rather than legislation, thereby allowing for more flexible and responsive administrative control, while simultaneously raising concerns about transparency.

While several parent advocacy organizations have come out in support of this Order, and some educators have expressed appreciation for the increased clarity, several criticisms of the Order have also been voiced.

Some literary advocacy groups have criticized the Order, labelling it a de facto book ban and warning that it sets a dangerous precedent. They argue that assigning bureaucratic criteria to literary content—especially those related to identity, gender, and sexuality—could lead to the exclusion of important narratives from marginalized voices.

Moreover, these groups caution that Alberta may be following a pattern seen in parts of the United States, where similar policies have led to the mass removal of books and a narrowing of student exposure to literature.

Finally, some educators and librarians have expressed concern about the administrative burden this Order introduces. Concerns about how school staff, already stretched thin, will be expected to implement the standards.

Conclusion: Balancing Access and Accountability

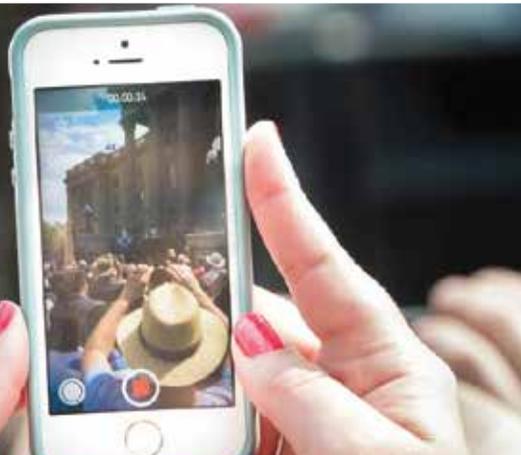
Ministerial Order 30/2025 is both a response to public pressure and a proactive attempt to create uniformity in an area long characterized by local discretion. While it aims to protect children and empower families, it also enters into sensitive territory, where issues of censorship, academic freedom, and social inclusion intersect.

Its long-term success will depend on careful implementation, ongoing consultation with educators and communities, and a willingness to refine the framework as needed. For now, the policy reflects Alberta's evolving view on what it means to provide not just access to education, but controlled, transparent, and accountable access to the content students encounter along the way.



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Photo Credit: Brendan Brown



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AARON SINGLETON
Associate - Digital Campaigns

Aaron brings years of political experience to our already strong government relations team. He leads Alberta Counsel's digital campaign portfolio which has quickly grown to include public relations support on issues ranging from the grassroots level to national reach. Having been trained by a leading digital organizer in the United States, he is well-equipped to take your digital campaigns to the next level by supporting clients' existing government relations objectives.

He earned a BA in Political Science from the University of Alberta and brings additional experience supporting progressive campaigns at both the provincial and federal level since 2011.

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POLITICAL EVENTS

UCP – Martin Long Golf Tournament

Friday, August 15th @ 10:00AM

Location: Whitecourt Golf & Country Club

- Join the West-Yellowhead UCP for their annual golf tournament.
- Tix: \$245 (unitedconservative.ca/events)

UCP AGM

November 28th – 30th, 2025

Location: Edmonton Expo Centre

- Join the United Conservative Party for their annual general meeting.
- Tix: \$119-\$999 (unitedconservative.ca/events)

NDP – Ask Me Anything Townhall

September 25th @ 7:15PM

Location: Arbour Lake Residents Association

- Join Court Ellingson for a free townhall event.
- Tix: Free (albertandpcaucus.ca/events)



KEY INFLUENCER PROFILE

JONATHAN CARLZON

COMMISSIONER, COMPASSIONATE INTERVENTION COMMISSION

Aileen Burke

Jonathan Carlzon is the inaugural Commissioner of Alberta's Compassionate Intervention Commission, bringing 23 years of experience in legal and public service to the role. His career spans administrative and ethics law, litigation, adjudication, and policy development within Alberta's recovery-oriented system of care.

Source: Sherwood Park Alliance Church

Currently serving as Director of Executive Operations and Chief of Staff in the Deputy Minister's Office at the Department of Justice, Carlzon provides strategic legal advice on legislation and ministry priorities. He previously held senior roles with Alberta Health Services (AHS), including Senior Advisor, Ethics and Compliance (2017–2023) and Senior Counsel, Litigation (2015–2017). His past public service includes positions with the Alberta Court of Appeal, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, and the Alberta Human Rights Commission.

Carlzon's experience extends internationally through pro bono work on child justice initiatives with the Canadian Bar Association, the UN, and civil society groups in Malaysia, Kenya, and Tanzania. He has delivered legal training on child advocacy to lawyers, nonprofits, and judiciary members abroad.

A graduate of the University of Alberta's J.D. program, he also holds an M.A. in Leadership, Theology, and Society from Regent College and a Certificate in International Law from the Organization of American States in Brazil.

He has served on the boards of organizations including Crossroads International and the John Howard Society of Alberta. Carlzon begins his three-year term as Commissioner on August 11, 2025.



PASCAL RYFFEL
VP of Corporate
Development and
Government Relations

After completing his MA in Media and International Development, Pascal spent four years with the Alberta NDP Caucus. Pascal has been directly involved in Alberta politics for almost two decades, including as a candidate in 2008, and has a deep and current knowledge of Alberta politics. Pascal has been with Alberta Counsel since 2015.

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AT A GLANCE

In the Media

New MOUs Signed with Ontario and Saskatchewan

Alberta and Ontario welcomed Saskatchewan into a new tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to collaboratively develop pipelines and trade infrastructure across provincial borders. This initiative aims to deliver Western Canada's oil and gas to southern Ontario refineries and establish a new deep sea port in James Bay, alongside rail links from Ontario's Ring of Fire to Western ports. The agreement builds on earlier MOUs signed between Alberta and Ontario that set the stage for deeper interprovincial energy and trade collaboration.

Alberta Premier Danielle Smith stated: "We're taking action to grow our economy, build real infrastructure and get major projects moving. Alberta is proud to lead the way in uniting with provinces that share a vision for responsible development, economic freedom and common sense. We're standing up for our oil and gas sector and making sure our world-class resources reach the markets that need them. Together, Alberta, Ontario and Saskatchewan are showing what's possible when provinces step up."

Increased Primary Care Options for Rural Albertans

Alberta is investing in rural primary health care through two new funding initiatives. A \$16 million bursary pilot program will support 74 family medicine residents placed in rural communities through 2027. Additionally, the Rural Team Recruitment Grant will invest \$6 million over two years into rural primary care clinics to hire nurses, pharmacists, and physiotherapists. These efforts, part of Alberta's Rural Health Action Plan, aim to build sustainable, team-based care that ensures faster local access to health services.

Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services, Adriana LaGrange, commented: "This is a great example of how we're delivering real improvements in primary health care. Our bursary program will help bring more family doctors to rural communities, and the team-based care grants mean Albertans will have better access to health professionals who can support their needs."

Alberta's Adds \$2.8 Billion to the Heritage Fund

Alberta has deposited an additional \$2.8 billion into its Heritage Savings Trust Fund, bringing the total to a record \$30 billion – up from \$27.2 billion the prior

year. The province aims to grow the fund to \$250 billion by 2050, enabling it to draw on investment income to help stabilize resource revenue, invest in infrastructure, support public services, and maintain low taxes.

"Alberta is turning resource strength into lasting financial security. By growing the Heritage Fund, we're strengthening core services like health care and education, while preserving the low-tax Alberta advantage. This \$2.8-billion boost to the Heritage Fund is a bold step that sets the province on the path to success and puts Albertans first," commented Premier Danielle Smith.

Alberta Leads in Housing Construction

Alberta remains the national leader in housing construction, according to a recent report by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). New CMHC data reveals that the province is on pace to surpass its record-breaking performance in 2024, with 27,902 housing starts recorded in the first half of 2025 – a 30% increase compared to the same period last year.

"Alberta's record housing starts are a clear sign that our approach is working. While other jurisdictions are falling behind, Alberta continues to step up – leading the way in housing construction, cutting red tape and delivering results that matter. This is what it looks like when a government does what it takes to get shovels in the ground and homes built," commented Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services, Jason Nixon.

New Investments in Waste Reduction and Resource Transformation

Alberta is investing up to \$49 million from the industry-funded Technology Innovation and Emissions Reduction (TIER) program to support 18 projects aimed at waste reduction and resource transformation. These initiatives are expected to create about 1,600 jobs and inject \$233 million into the provincial economy. Key areas of focus include waste management, carbon utilization, critical minerals, energy storage, geothermal energy, and recycling systems. It will also create the province's first recycling system for agricultural plastics and a facility that converts construction wood waste into building materials.

"Manufacturing is a pillar of our economy, employing tens of thousands of Albertans and solving real-world challenges. This funding will help manufacturers do more with the resources we already have, producing the goods Albertans rely on while strengthening the province's global competitiveness, creating more jobs and protecting the environment," stated Minister of Environment and Protected Areas, Rebecca Schulz.



SCOTT RATCH
Grant Writing Associate

Scott has recently completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science at the University of Alberta. While at university, he completed a co-op term as a Student Policy Analyst with the Government of Canada and served as an editor for the Political Science Undergraduate Review (PSUR).

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PIERRE POILIEVRE EYES COMEBACK IN ALBERTA BY-ELECTION

Scott Ratch

On August 18th, residents in Battle River-Crowfoot will return to the polls in a federal by-election, setting the stage for Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre's potential return to the House of Commons. The by-election was triggered following the resignation of incumbent MP Damien Kurek, who stepped aside to clear the way for Poilievre's candidacy.

Spanning nearly 53,000 square kilometers, Battle River-Crowfoot includes the communities of Camrose, Drumheller, Wainwright and Stettler. It is widely regarded as one of the safest Conservative seats in the country. Still, challenges from Alberta's separatism movement and the Longest Ballot Committee are leading to a more complicated race.

Poilievre is seeking a seat in the House of Commons following his upset loss to Liberal MP Bruce Fanjoy in Carleton back in April – a riding he held since 2004. Without a seat, Poilievre cannot serve as Leader of the Official Opposition and participate in question period. Former Conservative leader Andrew Scheer was selected by the party to serve in the role temporarily. Poilievre stated that as an MP for Battle River-Crowfoot, he will continue “fighting for oil and gas, low taxes, free enterprise, a strong defense and respect for the West.”

Challenges from the Alberta Separatism Movement

Although a decisive Conservative victory is expected, Poilievre's decision to run in Alberta is not without political risks. Separatist sentiments are on the rise in the province following the federal Liberals' victory last spring, despite lagging in the polls for months. A [recent poll](#) by Janet Brown suggests that one-third of Albertans believe the province would be better off if it were to separate from Canada.

Alberta Premier Danielle Smith says she's “never seen such a high level of separatist sentiment” across the province. During a provincial by-election held earlier this month in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, a separatist political party received almost 18 per cent of the vote. It is unclear whether a separatist candidate will run in the Battle River-Crowfoot by-election, potentially syphoning votes from Poilievre.

While Poilievre has expressed support for national unity, he has also acknowledged the provinces' frustrations with Ottawa. During a press conference on Parliament Hill, Poilievre stated that “Albertans want to be part of a united Canada, but they deserve to be treated with respect, and they deserve to be honoured for the immense contribution to this country.”

The issue may prove challenging to the Conservative leader's prospects nationally. Kory Teneycke, a conservative strategist, commented that Poilievre is about to be dragged into a debate that is “entirely unhelpful for the federal Conservative party.” While Poilievre must appeal to his base in the West, being drawn into separatist debates could weaken his standing in the vote-rich provinces of Ontario and Quebec. It will be difficult to remain silent on the issue as an Alberta-based MP, navigating regional tensions while building a national platform.

Record number of candidates running

The by-election will also break the record for the number of candidates registered on a federal ballot in Canadian history. The Longest Ballot Committee has registered over 200 independent candidates in the riding. The organization has been fielding dozens of candidates in certain races over the past years as a coordinated effort to protest the first-past-the-post system.

The protest group registered 91 candidates in Poilievre's former riding of Carleton last spring, resulting in meter-long ballots and significant delays in vote counting. In this by-election, there are more than 200 names registered.

In response, Elections Canada announced that it will use an adapted ballot in the upcoming by-election, allowing voters to write in the name of their preferred candidate. Poilievre has expressed frustration with the initiative, calling for a bill to be introduced in Parliament to curb the long ballot protests. “We have to take action because this is a scam. It is unfair, it is unjust and it must stop,” Poilievre stated while speaking at a town hall meeting in the riding.

Another challenge for Poilievre is attempting to match the impressive 83 per cent of the vote Kurek secured in the last election. By-elections typically generate low turnout, and voters may feel disengaged, having to return to the polls shortly after a federal election.

Other candidates have accused Poilievre of not understanding the unique needs of the riding, having resided in Ottawa for most of his political career. Liberal candidate Darcy Spady claims that he has encountered frustration over Kurek's resignation while door-knocking. “It comes up almost every single time that people are kind of angry that the previous representative got switched on them,” Spady commented.

While the degree of enthusiasm for Poilievre remains to be seen, amid challenges from separatist sentiments and protest candidates, Poilievre will be eager to secure a seat in the House of Commons and reclaim his visibility in the national spotlight.