

LGBTQ book opt-out ruling triggers national response from parents, educators, advocates

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After the [Supreme Court ruled 6-3 on Friday](#) that parents in Montgomery County, Maryland, must be allowed to opt their children out of LGBTQ-themed elementary school lessons, reactions were swift and sharply divided.

The case, Mahmoud v. Taylor, stemmed from Montgomery County's 2022 decision to incorporate LGBTQ-inclusive books into elementary classrooms.

Titles included "Uncle Bobby's Wedding," which features a same-sex couple, and "Born Ready," which tells the story of a transgender child.

The school district initially allowed parents to opt out their children from exposure to the books but later reversed that policy, citing administrative burdens and in an effort to foster inclusion.

In a press briefing shortly after the decision, U.S. Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche praised the ruling.

"Restoring the right of parents to make decisions about their children's education might seem like common sense," Blanche said, "but it took the Supreme Court to set the record straight."

For some, however, the ruling felt like a step backward.

"I think the ruling is a huge setback," Beth Hoffman, a Maryland-based mom of two, whose children attend public school in Frederick County, told "GMA." "Public schools should be an

inclusive space. I hope that this isn't an end-all be-all. We need to celebrate our differences and educate our youth to accept people for who they are."

The Frederick County Public School District, like Montgomery County, allows parents to opt children out of its Family Life Education curriculum, part of its "Comprehensive Health Education for students in grades 5-12," according to a spokesperson.

Bill Horn, a gay father of two based in Los Angeles, whose kids will be attending public school in the fall, said his initial reaction was sadness.

"I feel sorry for any young person whose family takes them out of an LGBTQ+ inclusive lesson, because ultimately that lesson might save their lives," he told "GMA" in an email.

Debate intensifies over parental rights and LGBTQ inclusion in public schools

Mahmoud v. Taylor was brought by brought by a group of Christian, Muslim and Jewish parents who argued the district's curriculum opt-out change violated their religious freedom. The Supreme Court's conservative majority agreed and upheld a preliminary injunction that requires schools to notify parents and permit opt-outs when such content is used.

Liberal Justices Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson dissented, saying exposure to diverse ideas does not amount to government indoctrination but is instead the purpose of public education.

While the decision applies directly to Montgomery County, it sets a precedent for similar lawsuits and policies nationwide.

In a statement following the ruling, Montgomery County Public Schools reaffirmed its commitment to diversity and inclusion, while expressing disappointment in the outcome.

"Although not surprised, we are disappointed in today's ruling. This decision complicates our work creating a welcoming, inclusive and equitable school system. It also sends a chilling message to many valued members of our diverse community," the district said.

"Montgomery County Public Schools remains a welcoming and inclusive school system that embraces and celebrates each and every one of our students," the statement continued. "We will maintain an environment where all students feel valued and supported. Equity is one of our core values and is foundational to who we are as a system that serves one of the most diverse communities in the United States of America."

MCPS added that it is reviewing the Supreme Court's decision and developing a plan for implementation that honors both the legal directive and the district's mission.

"We will continue to analyze the Supreme Court decision and develop next steps in alignment with today's decision and, as importantly, our values. Schools and families will receive further guidance prior to the start of the upcoming school year," the statement read. "MCPS will continue to have inclusive books, which reflect the rich diversity of the students and families that we serve in Montgomery County."

Supporters have hailed the court's decision as a long-overdue affirmation of family values.

"The Supreme Court sent a powerful message today: parents do not take a back seat to anyone when it comes to raising their kids," Grace Morrison, a board member for Kids First, a parental rights advocacy group, said in an official statement. "I am deeply grateful to have been part of this historic triumph for parental rights nationwide."

Critics, however, warn that the decision could mean further marginalization of LGBTQ students and could undermine efforts to build more inclusive classrooms moving forward.

Sari Beth Rosenberg, a U.S. history and AP U.S. history teacher in New York City, said the ruling could make it significantly harder to create welcoming spaces for all students.

"It sends a message to LGBTQ students and families that their identities are controversial or unwelcome, which completely undermines my efforts to build a respectful, supportive learning environment," Rosenberg said.

"Our schools are supposed to prepare students to participate in a diverse democracy, and we can't do that if we're forced to erase entire communities from the curriculum."

Differing views on liberty and inclusion

Eric Baxter, vice president and senior counsel at Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, which represented the plaintiffs in the case, called the ruling "a historic victory for parental rights" in an official statement.

"Today, the Court restored common sense and made clear that parents -- not government -- have the final say in how their children are raised," he added.

But LGBTQ advocates say the ruling allows families to exempt their children from learning about diverse identities, sending harmful messages to students whose families reflect those very realities.

"Every child deserves to see themselves reflected in the stories they read and to be celebrated in their classrooms for who they truly are," said Kelley Robinson, president of the Human Rights Campaign. "This ruling not only tells LGBTQ+ students that they don't belong, but that their experiences and existence are less worthy of respect. It's wrong, it's dangerous, and it's cruel, plain and simple."

Ruling on online access raises censorship concerns

In a separate 6-3 decision Friday, the court [upheld a Texas law](#) requiring websites with significant sexual content to implement strict age-verification systems. The law mandates that adult sites where more than one-third of content is deemed "harmful to minors" must verify users' age using secure identification before granting access.

The court's decision only affects the Texas law and not similar laws instituted in other states.

Titania Jordan, chief parent officer at Bark Technologies, a parental controls company that helps parents protect their children online, said enforcing such a requirement at scale poses major technological and financial challenges, particularly for smaller platforms.

"Sites would need to integrate reliable identity providers or build their own verification systems, which can be expensive and technically complex," Jordan told "GMA."

"Implementing biometric checks or secure document scans requires strict anti-fraud measures."

Still, she said she supports the overall goal of the law.

"Let's not lose focus of what's important here: keeping kids safer online," she said. "To protect both children and digital freedoms, any legislation should be narrowly tailored and paired with rigorous oversight to maximize data privacy."

Legal experts say the ruling raises new questions about internet censorship, particularly if definitions of "sexual" content expand.

Austin-based criminal defense attorney Sam Bassett noted that while the court backed Texas, it rejected the Fifth Circuit's earlier rationale.

"The Fifth Circuit applied the rational basis test -- the least rigorous standard used to evaluate constitutional challenges -- agreeing with Texas that the ID requirement didn't implicate a fundamental right, since it only applied to minors," he told "GMA."

"The Supreme Court decision did not agree with the Fifth Circuit's 'rational basis' application of First Amendment protections, yet it also rejected the higher 'strict scrutiny' standard of analysis," he continued. "The basis for their decision seems to be largely based upon an

analysis that the Texas age-verification statute was targeted at limiting access only to those under the age of 18, and we have many laws which prohibit access to minors."

Still, Bassett warned that if the law were applied more broadly to restrict access to non-explicit but sensitive material, such as information about gender identity or sexual orientation, it could raise serious constitutional issues.

"A prohibition of access to those types of websites, in my view, would likely face a 'strict scrutiny' analysis under the First Amendment, as there is no recognized precedent to bar minors from information regarding those topics," he said.

Together, the two rulings reflect a growing legal and political divide over who gets to decide what young people can see, learn and access, whether in a classroom or on the internet.

Although the LGBTQ+ book ruling currently applies only to Montgomery County, legal analysts say it could shape broader education policy and religious liberty claims across the country in the years to come.

"This is just the beginning," said Hoffman, the Maryland-based mom. "And I really hope it's not where we end."