

Haynes Boone Victory Protects Booksellers from Unconstitutional Texas Book-Rating Law

October 22, 2025 Laura Prather, Catherine Robb, Michael Lambert, Reid Pillifant

PRACTICES Anti-SLAPP and First Amendment Rights, Public Law, Media and Entertainment Litigation, Litigation

Haynes Boone secured a major First Amendment victory on behalf of a coalition of booksellers, authors and publishers in *Book People, Inc. v. Wong*, after the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Texas held that Texas House Bill 900 (the READER Act) is unconstitutional. The court's decision permanently blocks provisions in the law that would have required book vendors to review library books and materials for sexual content and rate them in order to sell materials to Texas public schools.

The ruling confirms that HB 900's book rating system unlawfully compels speech and imposes vague, burdensome requirements based on unclear state guidelines. The law, which presented an existential crisis for independent booksellers, also gave the Texas Education Agency (TEA) the power to override all ratings and publicly blacklist all booksellers who did not acquiesce and adopt TEA's view.

Haynes Boone Media Law Practice Group Chair [Laura Lee Prather](#) led the firm's representation of the coalition that includes BookPeople, a leading independent bookstore based in Austin. Prather was assisted by Counsel [Catherine Robb](#) and Associates [Michael Lambert](#) and [Reid Pillifant](#). The case carries significant implications for how states regulate access to books in schools and the role of private vendors in those decisions.

"Today's decision is a victory for protecting the First Amendment rights of booksellers," said Prather. "The READER Act would have imposed impossible obligations on booksellers and limited access to literature, including classic works, for students across Texas. We are proud to stand up for free expression and the First Amendment rights of all Texans."

The ruling confirms that book rating systems cannot be outsourced to private sellers under threat of government penalty and that vague, overbroad criteria without consideration of a work's literary, artistic, scientific or political value cannot serve as the basis for such ratings. The ruling sets an important precedent for similar laws being considered in other states.

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