

**St. Tammany Parish Library
Board of Control Meeting
March 27, 2023
St. Tammany Parish Council Chambers
21490 Koop Dr.
Mandeville, LA 70471
6:30 P.M.**

MINUTES

The meeting was called to order by Rebecca (Becky) Taylor, President. Kelly LaRocca, Director, called the roll and declared that a quorum was present.

Present: Jake Airey, Carmen Butler, Ann Shaw, Becky Taylor

Absent: Mary Reneau

Emily Couvillon with the Civil Division of the District Attorney's Office was also present as legal counsel for the library.

B. Taylor explained the rules for public comment. A three-minute time limit is established for each member of the public wishing to speak (for or against) an item on the Agenda. In the case of a Statement of Concern decision, the person who filed the Statement of Concern is given five minutes to speak. The meeting was streamed live via a link posted to the library's website.

1. Approval of the minutes of the meeting of the Library Board of Control that was held on February 28, 2023.

Discussion: There were no suggested corrections to the minutes.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

Vote: J. Airey moved to approve the minutes of the February 28, 2023 board meeting. It was seconded by C. Butler. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried.

2. NEW BUSINESS

A. Financial Reports – February 2023

Discussion: K. LaRocca reported that the library has received 66% of the expected Ad Valorem funding and 1/3 of the expected State Revenue Sharing. The budget percentage for this point in the year is 16.66%. Revenues are at 16.70% and expenditures are at 17.53%. K. LaRocca explained that the revenue percentage is higher than budgeted due to higher than anticipated interest rates. K. LaRocca reviewed the expenditure lines that are over budget. The Workers Compensation line is at 68.82% due to a portion being due early in the year. The Publication of Legal Notices continues to be above budget due to longer board meeting minutes. The Polaris Maintenance line is at 97% due to paying for the service in full for the year. The Web Design Consultant line is at 94% due to paying for the website early in the year. The Insurance and Claims lines are above budget because insurance policies are paid for in large portions early in the year. The Library In-Service Training and Juvenile Programming lines are above budget due to purchasing Ozobots and Ozobot training sessions. The Friends of the Library will reimburse those expenses. The PC Network line is at 68% due to purchasing the first group of new computers for the year. The Capital Outlay-Library Resource Acquisitions lines vary due to paying for the materials at different times of the year.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

Vote: A. Shaw moved to approve the February 2023 Financial Reports. It was seconded by C. Butler. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried.

B. Director's Report

Discussion: K. LaRocca reported that the renovation work at the new Technical Services building begins on April 3, 2023. The work should be complete by June 2, 2023. Per our Cyber Security policy, an external penetration test was conducted by a certified security consultant to test the vulnerability of our data systems. The report was positive and commended the I.T. staff for their work to maintain a secure internet-facing structure.

Staff promoted the library on The Lake and The Highway radio stations and STPG-TV's Check It Out show. Staff participated in the following community events and meetings: St. Tammany Health System and Ochsner Employer Breakfast meeting, Keep Louisiana Beautiful Clean-Up Supplies Loaner Library Program meeting, Family Literacy Night at Folsom Elementary, COAST, St. Tammany Commission on Families meeting, and the Students with Exceptionalities Games at Lakeshore High School. Staff provided outreach to five local preschools and

elementary schools for Read Across America as well as Kinder Haus Montessori and Bayou Woods Elementary for STEM Day. Staff attended the State Library's Summer Reading Workshop for Adults and the RootsTech Genealogy Conference. Staff held the following classes and programs: Recipe Swap, Book Clubs, Genealogy Time, Tech Time, African American Genealogy Research, Irish Genealogy Research, Google Tools, Intro to the Cloud, Top Scams in LA in 2022, and Zentangle for Brain Health.

The library has received 18 public records requests (PRR) since November 2022. Email searches are done by our I.T. Department, but then have to be reviewed for relevance and redacted by the District Attorney's Office. For example, one of the uncompleted PRRs yielded 30,459 emails that are waiting in line to be reviewed and redacted. The library is in the process of filling a full-time position to help with PRRs.

To date, the library has received 194 Statements of Concern on 157 titles since August 2022. After concern that there was a challenged book on the shelf, I.T. investigated the email server and discovered six additional titles that were submitted in December that were not previously seen. The titles were added to the list and placed with the other challenged titles behind the circulation desk. K. LaRocca stated that she received approval from the Attorney General's Office to obtain legal advice on March 15, 2023. Library staff will now be making recommendations for Board decisions at upcoming meetings.

New contracts and renewals are as follows: Microsoft 365 renewal (email and Microsoft Office), OCLC for GreenGlass subscription (print collection analysis), Librarica for CASSIE support renewal (manages public computers), Librarica for Jamex Warranty renewal (coin machines for public printers), Daikin HVAC renewals for Slidell and Madisonville branches.

K. LaRocca reviewed the February 2023 and year-to-date service statistics.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

C. Resolution to extend time to allow for procedural due process of undecided Statements of Concern

Discussion: K. LaRocca explained that the Board will be addressing five titles at this meeting and there will be another 152 titles left for the Board to review. K. LaRocca is asking the Board to extend the review time to 120 days for the remaining titles. The 120-day extension will begin on the date of this resolution.

Public Comment:

Kevin Marino – Stated that he supports the proposal to extend time to review. Spoke of the tax dollars and amount of time wasted on Statements of Concern. Thanked the staff and stated they deserved raises.

Lisa Rustemeyer – Covington, LA. Supports the resolution. Stated that books are meant to be read as whole works, but most Statements of Concern contain cherry-picked politically driven reviews which lead to distorted views of the books.

David Cogle – Spoke of the book that was discovered on the shelves due to a clerical error after a Statement of Concern was submitted. Accused library staff of working with Deborah Caldwell Stone, attorney for the American Library Association (ALA), to undermine parents’ concerns about the same the book in 2021. Stated that librarians cannot be trusted.

Cynthia Weatherly – From Covington, LA. Board members were provided a copy of her public comment, from which she read aloud. Asked for all literature currently held behind the desk to be placed back on the shelves. Spoke of the long review period and stated that restricting access for more than 120 days violates her 1st Amendment rights.

K. LaRocca read the resolution aloud.

Vote: J. Airey moved to adopt the resolution to extend time to allow for the procedural due process of undecided Statements of Concern. It was seconded by A. Shaw. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried.

D. Statement of Concern – *I Am Jazz*

K. LaRocca referenced Section 407: Statements of Concern About Library Resources from the Rules and Regulations of the St. Tammany Parish Library Board of Control and gave a brief review of the process. Stated that the Board needs to vote to affirm, modify, reject, or take under advisement the committee’s recommendation. The decision of the Board will be rendered by a majority vote. In the event of a tie, the recommendation is affirmed.

K. LaRocca presented the Statement of Concern for the book *I Am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings. The statement was submitted by Connie Phillips, representing the St. Tammany Parish Library Accountability Project and Citizens Against Child Exploitation. K. LaRocca read the statement aloud. The recommended action by C. Phillips is to “Move to request only section as this book violates the Harmful to Minors Statute in particular R.S. 94:91:11 [sic] in particular

section 3. The material is offensive to the average adult applying contemporary community standards with respect to what is suitable to minors.”

K. LaRocca reviewed the book résumé which includes the publisher’s summary, number of copies STPL owns, circulation statistics, comparable library system statistics, reviews by *School Library Journal*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *Booklist*, and *Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*. Also noted are awards and lists that feature this title. A total of 843 public libraries across the nation own copies of the book. The title is shelved in the Juvenile Non-Fiction collection at STPL.

K. LaRocca reviewed the committee’s evaluation of the title which includes demographics of the committee members, the committee’s report, and the committee’s recommendation. The title has previously been challenged and was reviewed by a committee. The committee decided to keep the book in its current classification. The decision was appealed by the patron and the Board voted to uphold the committee’s decision at the December 13, 2022 board meeting.

Since the current complainant cites Louisiana Criminal Law Revised Statute 14:91.11, the book was evaluated based on the criteria set forth in the statute. K. LaRocca stated that legal counsel has advised the Board that all four criteria in the R.S. 14:91.11 must be true to violate the statute. The committee did not find any violations of the statute.

Committee Recommendation: Book is appropriate in its current location in the Juvenile Non-Fiction Collection at STPL.

Other options for the Board: Move the book to Children’s Biography, Adult Non-Fiction, a parenting section that would have to be created and located in Adult Non-Fiction, restrict the book behind the circulation desk, or remove it from the library.

Public Comment:

Connie Phillips, the patron who submitted the Statement of Concern, was offered five minutes for public comment. She was not in attendance and did not appear for public comment.

Fran Smith – Slidell, LA. Stated that she played with boys when she was younger, but her parents did not say that she should be a boy. Stated that later in life many transgender people decide that they no longer want to be transgender. Stated that the library is promoting this.

Rachel Rhodes – Stated that in the past she has felt the same as those opposing books regarding transgender people, but her views changed when her transgender daughter came out to her. Stated she is afraid for her daughter who has received death threats and verbal attacks. Stated transgender people are human beings, beautiful souls and not perverts.

Mel Manuel – Madisonville, LA. Stated that 431 anti-LGBTQ bills have been proposed nationwide this year. Stated that Louisiana's HB81 would make it illegal for teachers to use students' preferred names and pronouns. Spoke of a Florida bill that would cause them to lose their 11-year-old daughter if passed in Louisiana. Stated that groups like the Accountability Project and Citizens for a New Louisiana equate queers with pedophiles and are stoking fear in the hearts of local residents.

Kevin Marino – Stated that he agrees that the books are shelved appropriately. Spoke about 1st Amendment rights. Stated that Connie Phillips stated that there is a miniscule number of transgender people in St. Tammany and that the book is offensive to the average adult. Stated that hate and bigotry is offensive.

Keith Peterson – Stated that he does not envy the Board's position in dealing with conflicting points of view. Asked about the criteria when evaluating the books. Asked if they can put aside their personal opinions and evaluate the books based on educational and literary value.

Jonathan Varnado – Madisonville, LA. Spoke of the Nashville students who were murdered in school earlier in the day and the irony of discussing the harm that library books cause. Stated that it is an extreme religious group spreading their hatred and ideology. Stated that if they cared and channeled their efforts into other issues they could do some good. Appreciates the Board's support of the community.

Cynthia Weatherly – Covington, LA. Spoke about the 120-day extension and stated that it will take years to go through the complaints. Asked for those who know, love, or are members of the LGBTQ+ community to stand up to be seen. Stated that *I Am Jazz* is an essential resource that promotes empathy, understanding, and acceptance.

Barbara Hargrove – Abita Springs, LA. Stated she is sorry the Board has to waste their time and taxpayer's money on this issue. Stated she is not offended by the book *I Am Jazz*. Stated she believes she is in the majority and that those who are offended are in the minority. Spoke of the millage renewal next year and hopes that funding is not cut from the library.

David Ziegler – Pearl River, LA. Asked the Board to continue keeping the books restricted. Stated that the majority of the Parish does not want their children to access pornography and sexually explicit material. Shared a dream he had the night before. Stated that as the majority they are not going to stop.

John Parauka – Mandeville, LA. Opposes banning books and putting them in anywhere other than their appropriate circulation location. Stated his father served in WWII, fought against

fascism, and hundreds of thousands of people died fighting for democracy. Referenced the book *Profiles in Courage* by John F. Kennedy and stated that the Board could be another chapter in that book.

Kim Turner – Mandeville, LA. Stated that she is a writer and it is extraordinary to make a small child feel seen, heard, valued, and loved. Stated that these books are integral to that and representation in literature can save lives and can make an LGBTQ person feel welcome, whole, and loved. Stated that this is an opportunity for grace and hope. Stated that they are not going away either.

Roxanne Newman – Mandeville, LA. Spoke in support of keeping *I Am Jazz* on the shelves. Stated that one of her children is gay and one has autism. Stated that the book has a message of love and acceptance. Stated that it is a waste of resources to revisit the same challenged books when the decision was to keep the books on the shelves. Stated that placing books in a request-only section is censorship and violates the 1st Amendment.

Andrea Romero – New Orleans, LA. Stated that she is the President of the Gulf South LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce. Stated she has two children and she is transgender. Stated she lived in shame and denial for decades. Stated that *I Am Jazz* is the book she used to teach her daughters about her. Stated she escaped chemical dependency and created a life that is genuine, honest, and sincere.

Erin Kennedy – Stated she is disturbed that some are comparing the books to grooming, which is a term used to describe a specific brand of sexual abuse. Stated that the same group that demands protecting children from books are the same people who supported reading explicit passages aloud at last month's meeting where there was a child present. Stated that the book was shelved in the adult section of the library, not near the children's picture books and chapter books.

Catalina Reyna – Mandeville, LA. Commented on the books *I Am Jazz* and *My Rainbow* being judged twice, since they have already been appealed and decided recently. Spoke of the comment on the Statement of Concern that transgenderism is a rare sexual disorder and felt offended by that assertion. Feels as though the person who stated that is either ignorant, uninformed, or wants to cause harm.

Discussion: B. Taylor stated that this Statement of Concern cites the Louisiana Criminal Law Revised Statute 14:91.11, which is a different reason than the previous challenge. That is why this title is being evaluated again. B. Taylor stated that the book does not violate the R.S. 14:91.11 and should remain where it is currently shelved.

J. Airey expressed his disappointment in the fact that the person who challenged the book did not attend the meeting and considered it cowardly not to do so. Stated that the book does not violate the R.S. 14:91.11. Stated that it is controversial, but not offensive from an adult's standpoint. Stated that he would support moving the book to a different section, as it is a teaching tool for parents. Reiterated that parents are supposed to monitor what their children read within the library, as this is a public library, not a children's library. Recommended shelving the book in a parenting section of the library.

A. Shaw agreed that parents can use the book as a teaching resource. Recommended the library create a parenting resource section of the library to house books such as *I Am Jazz* and other subjects.

There were comments from the public. Emily Couvillon stated that the public comment period is over and discussion is between Board members at this time. Stated that anyone who comments from the audience at this time may be asked to leave.

Vote: J. Airey moved to relocate *I Am Jazz* to a potential parenting section in Adult Non-Fiction. It was seconded by A. Shaw. Roll call vote:

Jake Airey – Yes
Ann Shaw – Yes
Becky Taylor – No
Carmen Butler – No

The vote resulted in a tie, therefore the committee's recommendation is affirmed.

E. Statement of Concern – *Julian Is a Mermaid*

K. LaRocca presented the Statement of Concern for the book *Julian Is a Mermaid* by Jessica Love. The statement was submitted by Connie Phillips, representing the St. Tammany Parish Library Accountability Project and Citizens Against Child Exploitation. K. LaRocca read the statement aloud. The recommended action by C. Phillips is to "Move to request only section as this book violates the [sic] The Harmful to Minors Statute in particular R.S. 94:91:11 [sic] in particular section 3. The material is offensive to the average adult applying contemporary community standards with respect to what is suitable to minors."

K. LaRocca reviewed the book résumé which includes the publisher's summary, number of copies STPL owns, circulation statistics, comparable library system statistics, reviews by *Booklist*, *Publisher's Weekly*, *School Library Journal*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *Horn Book Magazine*,

BookPage, Hornbook Guide to Children, Shelf Awareness, and Common Sense Media. Also noted are awards and lists featuring this title. A total of 875 public libraries across the nation own copies of the book. The title is shelved in the Picture Book collection at STPL.

K. LaRocca reviewed the committee's evaluation of the title which includes demographics of the committee members, the committee's report, and the committee's recommendation. The title has previously been challenged and was reviewed by a committee. The committee decided to keep the book in its current classification.

Since the current complainant cites Louisiana Criminal Law Revised Statute 14:91.11, the book was evaluated based on the criteria set forth in the statute. As stated previously, all four criteria in the R.S. 14:91.11 must be true to violate the statute. The committee did not find any violations of the statute.

Committee Recommendation: Book is appropriate in its current location in the Picture Book collection.

Other options for the Board: Move to Children's Non-fiction, Adult Non-fiction, a parenting section that would have to be created and located in Adult Non-fiction, restrict the book behind the circulation desk, or remove it from the library.

Public Comment:

Connie Phillips, the patron who submitted the Statement of Concern, was offered five minutes for public comment. She was not in attendance and did not appear for public comment.

Casey Kugler – Covington, LA. Stated he does not agree with banning books and these books represent empathy and understanding. Spoke about his 20 years of struggling that could have been helped with access to books like this. Stated that if these books help one child from feeling suicidal, they are worth keeping in the library.

Tamara Murray – Covington, LA. Spoke in favor of keeping *Julian Is a Mermaid* on the shelves and that the book is about love and acceptance. Stated there is no evidence that books make kids or adults gay or transgender; however, these books might save their lives. Stated that Connie Phillips does not represent most people in the Parish.

Lisa Rustemeyer – Covington, LA. Stated that she loved the book *Julian Is a Mermaid* and the artwork. Spoke of children play acting. Stated that books like this are needed and contain no sexual content. Asked that the books being discussed stay where they are currently shelved.

Rebecca Bohm – Stated a quote by author Neil Gaiman: “There are no bad authors or books for children because every child is different.” Stated that she is an average adult and does not find the book offensive. Stated that there is an anti-LGBTQ agenda with the book complaints. Stated that this issue is a waste of everyone’s time and resources.

Michelle Gardner – Madisonville, LA. Stated that the complaints should be dismissed since the complainant Connie Phillips did not attend the meeting and asked the Board to consider that for future meetings. Stated that transgenderism is not a sexual disorder.

John Parauka – Mandeville, LA. Stated he is disappointed in two board members’ votes. Questioned the reasoning or need for a parenting section. Spoke of fascism, nazism, racism, sexism, and ageism. Spoke of the Upstairs Lounge fire in New Orleans in 1973. Many of the bodies were unclaimed because their relatives did not want to acknowledge them.

Roxanne Newman – Mandeville, LA. Stated that it is clear that the objectors have not read the books and noted that the information is copied and pasted from websites. Objects to a separate parenting section.

M.J. Cascio – Abita Springs, LA. Stated that they have been gay since the age of three. They came out in high school, was bullied and called names. Spoke of the school shooting that occurred earlier in the day. There was a comment from a member of the public in attendance asking who the shooter was. M.J. Cascio commented that the shooter was transgender. There was continued discussion between the member of the public and M.J. Cascio that led to disruption. Thanked the Board and stated they appreciate their efforts.

Yvonne Madere – Mandeville, LA. Against over-sexualizing children. Stated that it is for parents to discuss with children and should not be in a library. Stated it is not censorship if the library does not have the books. Suggested a parent resource section.

Discussion: B. Taylor stated that in her opinion, the book does not violate the LA Criminal Law R.S. 14:91.11 and recommends that it should stay shelved in its current collection. J. Airey stated that he does not think the book is obscenity.

Vote: J. Airey moved to affirm the committee’s decision to keep *Julian Is a Mermaid* in the Picture Book collection. It was seconded by A. Shaw. Roll call vote:

- Jake Airey – Yes
- Ann Shaw – Yes
- Becky Taylor – Yes

Carmen Butler – Yes

Motion carried. The committee’s recommendation is affirmed.

F. Statement of Concern – *My Rainbow*

K. LaRocca presented the Statement of Concern for the book *My Rainbow* by Trinity and DeShanna Neal. The statement was submitted by Connie Phillips, representing the St. Tammany Parish Library Accountability Project and Citizens Against Child Exploitation. K. LaRocca read the statement aloud. The recommended action by C. Phillips is to “Move to request only section as this book violates the [sic] The Harmful to Minors Statute in particular R.S. 94:91:11 [sic] in particular section 3. The material is offensive to the average adult applying contemporary community standards with respect to what is suitable to minors.”

K. LaRocca reviewed the book résumé which includes the publisher’s summary, number of copies STPL owns, circulation statistics, comparable library system statistics, reviews by *Kirkus Reviews*, *School Library Journal*, and *Publishers Weekly*. Also noted are awards and lists featuring this title. A total of 385 public libraries across the nation own copies of the book. The title is shelved in the Picture Book collection at STPL.

K. LaRocca reviewed the committee’s evaluation of the title which includes demographics of the committee members, the committee’s report, and the committee’s recommendation. The title has previously been challenged and was reviewed by a committee. The committee decided to keep the book in its current classification. The decision was appealed by the patron and the Board voted to uphold the committee’s decision at the December 13, 2022 board meeting.

Since the current complainant cites Louisiana Criminal Law Revised Statute 14:91.11, the book was evaluated based on the criteria set forth in the statute. As stated previously, all four criteria in the R.S. 14:91.11 must be true to violate the statute. The committee did not find any violations of the statute.

Committee Recommendation: Book is appropriate in its current location in the Picture Book collection.

Other options for the Board: Move to Children’s Non-fiction, Adult Non-fiction, a parenting section that would have to be created and located in Adult Non-fiction, restrict the book behind the circulation desk, or remove it from the library.

Public Comment:

Connie Phillips, the patron who submitted the Statement of Concern, was offered five minutes for public comment. She was not in attendance and did not appear for public comment.

Jeri Creson – Covington, LA. Stated that she has used *My Rainbow* as a resource to teach kindness, acceptance, and compassion to her children’s yoga classes. Asked to keep *My Rainbow* where it is currently shelved.

Tawny Marcotte – Stated they are a trans non-binary person. Supports keeping the book *My Rainbow* where it is currently shelved. Summarized the story of Trinity, a young transgender girl with autism whose family supports her by making a wig for Trinity. Stated there is no obscenity or sexuality in the book.

Guillermo Duarte – Mandeville, LA. Stated he did not see any pornography in *My Rainbow* and is confused as to why others are so passionate about restricting this book. Stated that some people’s motives are not about protecting children and they are imparting their own fear, disgust, and hatred.

Roxanne Newman – Mandeville, LA. Asked for the book to remain shelved in the children’s section. Stated that it is important for children to be exposed to people who are different from them so that they learn acceptance.

Mel Manual – Madisonville, LA. Stated that the idea of a parenting section is upsetting. Stated that putting trans books in a separate section suggests that there is something wrong with being trans. Stated they do not think that is the intention of the Board members and they believe the Board is attempting to placate the Accountability Project.

Andrea Romero – New Orleans, LA. Stated the book is about parental love and acceptance. Stated that restricting the book creates shame and unworthiness in a child who wants to access the book.

Discussion: B. Taylor stated that in her opinion the book does not violate the LA Criminal Law R.S. 14:91.11 and recommends that it remains where it is currently shelved. J. Airey stated that it does not violate the statute. He explained that he understands that if a book is moved to another section of the library that people may think that there is something wrong with it. He added that there are many books that are teaching tools for parents. He asked what is our equivalent to easy books and easy reader formats. K. LaRocca explained that our equivalent is picture books, as our easy reader books are more for learning cite words.

Vote: J. Airey moved to relocate *My Rainbow* to the Juvenile Non-fiction collection. Motion failed due to lack of a second. A. Shaw moved to affirm the committee's decision to keep *My Rainbow* shelved in the Picture Book collection. It was seconded by C. Butler. Roll call vote:

Jake Airey – No
Ann Shaw – Yes
Becky Taylor – Yes
Carmen Butler – Yes

Motion carried. The committee's recommendation is affirmed.

G. Statement of Concern – *When Aiden Became a Brother*

K. LaRocca presented the Statement of Concern for the book *When Aiden Became a Brother* by Kyle Lukoff. The statement was submitted by Connie Phillips, representing the St. Tammany Parish Library Accountability Project and Citizens Against Child Exploitation. K. LaRocca read the statement aloud. The recommended action by C. Phillips is to "Move to request only section as this book violates the [sic] The Harmful to Minors Statute in particular R.S. 94:91:11 [sic] in particular section 3. The material is offensive to the average adult applying contemporary community standards with respect to what is suitable to minors."

K. LaRocca reviewed the book résumé which includes the publisher's summary, number of copies STPL owns, circulation statistics, comparable library system statistics, reviews by *Kirkus Reviews*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Shelf Awareness*, *School Library Journal*, *Booklist*, *Horn Book Magazine*, and *Hornbook Guide to Children*. Also noted are awards and lists featuring this title. A total of 810 public libraries across the nation own copies of the book. The title is shelved in the Picture Book collection at STPL.

K. LaRocca reviewed the committee's evaluation of the title which includes demographics of the committee members, the committee's report, and the committee's recommendation. The title has previously been challenged and was reviewed by a committee. The committee decided to keep the book in its current classification.

Since the current complainant cites Louisiana Criminal Law Revised Statute 14:91.11, the book was evaluated based on the criteria set forth in the statute. As stated previously, all four criteria in the R.S. 14:91.11 must be true to violate the statute. The committee did not find any violations of the statute.

Committee Recommendation: Book is appropriate in its current location in the Picture Book collection.

Other options for the Board: Move to Children's Non-fiction, Adult Non-fiction, a parenting section that would have to be created and located in Adult Non-fiction, restrict the book behind the circulation desk, or remove it from the library.

Public Comment:

Connie Phillips, the patron who submitted the Statement of Concern, was offered five minutes for public comment. She was not in attendance and did not appear for public comment.

Roxanne Newman – Asked for the Board to keep *When Aiden Became a Brother* shelved in its current collection.

Evette Randolph – Abita Springs, LA. Stated she has a transgender son and he should feel represented, not marginalized. Stated that a weight was lifted off her son's shoulders once he told her about his true self. Spoke of her son and his friend once being in fear of living in St. Tammany.

Denyse Lincoln – Slidell, LA. Stated she was initially concerned with some of the explicit content that she saw in some of the challenged books, but then realized that the majority of the books are not explicit and is wondering why they are being questioned. Spoke of freedom of speech and the Constitution.

Discussion: B. Taylor stated that the book does not violate the statute and is in favor of keeping the book shelved in its current collection. J. Airey agreed that it does not violate the statute. A. Shaw stated that she agrees with the decision to keep the book in the Picture Book collection, but it would also be a good book to put in a parenting resource section.

Vote: C. Butler moved to affirm the committee's decision to keep *When Aiden Became a Brother* shelved in the Picture Books collection. It was seconded by A. Shaw. Roll call vote:

Jake Airey – No
Ann Shaw – Yes
Becky Taylor – Yes
Carmen Butler – Yes

Motion carried. The committee's recommendation is affirmed.

H. Statement of Concern – *The Bluest Eye*

K. LaRocca presented two Statements of Concern for the book *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. The first statement was submitted by Connie Phillips, representing the St. Tammany Parish Library Accountability Project and Citizens Against Child Exploitation. K. LaRocca read the statement aloud. The recommended action by C. Phillips is to “Restrict access to minors as outlined in statute above. Require parent to check out for minor. The book should be shelved in a section where minors do not have access. A separate place in the library. A room or some section where minors do not have entry without parent and minors cannot check out.”

The second statement was submitted by Fran Smith. The recommended action by F. Smith is to “take it out of the libraries.”

K. LaRocca reviewed the book résumé which includes the publisher’s summary, number of copies STPL owns, circulation statistics, comparable library system statistics, reviews by *The New Yorker* and *Common Sense Media*. Also noted are awards and lists featuring this title. A total of 6,034 public libraries across the nation own copies of the book. The title is shelved in the Adult Fiction collection at STPL.

K. LaRocca reviewed the committee’s evaluation of the title which includes demographics of the committee members, the committee’s report, and the committee’s recommendation. The title has previously been challenged and was reviewed by a committee. The committee decided to keep the book in its current classification. Additionally, the committee noted that the author is a Pulitzer Prize, Nobel Prize, and Presidential Medal of Freedom winner. The title is included in many high school reading lists and is taught in many colleges and universities.

Since the current complainant cites Louisiana Criminal Law Revised Statute 14:91.11, the book was evaluated based on the criteria set forth in the statute. K. LaRocca stated that legal counsel has advised the Board that all four criteria in the R.S. 14:91.11 must be true to be a violation of the statute. The committee did not find a violation of the statute.

Committee Recommendation: Book should remain in the collection and is appropriate in its current location in Adult Fiction.

Other options for the Board: Restrict it behind the circulation desk or remove it from the library.

Public Comment:

Connie Phillips, the patron who submitted the Statement of Concern, was offered five minutes for public comment. She was not in attendance and did not appear for public comment.

Fran Smith, the second patron who submitted the Statement of Concern, was offered five minutes for public comment.

Fran Smith – Slidell, LA. Stated that it was rude to call Connie Phillips a coward. Stated that C. Phillips had a personal matter to attend to. Stated she also read reviews from *Common Sense Media* and stated that it is inappropriate for individuals under 18 to read. Stated there are passages in the book describing rape, child abuse, and sex. Stated that she chose to read that book because she can relate to the main character. Stated that the book did not help her whatsoever. She read excerpts from *The Bluest Eye* aloud. Asked for this book to be put away where children cannot access it.

Jeri Creson – Covington, LA. Stated that some books contain graphic depictions of rape and other real-life trauma so that we can understand those who have experienced it. Stated the book is shelved in the Adult section, far from the children's section and that the library has a tiered library card system to help parents choose what they want to allow their children to read.

Robin Schulberg – Covington, LA. Stated she is a member of the Executive Committee of the NAACP of Greater Covington. Asked the Board to keep *The Bluest Eye* in the adult section of the library. Stated the national NAACP condemns the censorship of *The Bluest Eye*.

Lawrence DeQuay – Slidell, LA. Stated that context is everything and picking selective passages does not give an idea of what the book is about. Spoke of verses of the Bible as an example. Read a quote about freedom to read aloud.

Milton Beard – Lacombe, LA. Stated he believes the Bible is the word of God. Believes St. Tammany Parish and the world is put in a place of choosing between good and evil and spiritual warfare is going on. Stated that the Bible is the greatest love book ever written and stated he puts his faith and trust in it.

Cynthia Weatherly – Stated that *The Bluest Eye* is modern day Shakespeare and is on the same level as William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. Commented on Jake Airey disagreeing with the rest of the Board's decisions. Stated that *The Bluest Eye* was recently featured on The Today Show and was included in book clubs by both Oprah Winfrey and Jenna Bush.

Laura Dinapolis – Covington, LA. Stated that there were some difficult parts of *The Bluest Eye*, but there were also laughable parts that she could relate to when she was a young girl. She read aloud a re-write of Toni Morrison's first page of the book as an homage to the author.

Elizabeth Alston – Covington, LA. Stated that Mark Twain said that if you travel, it is impossible to be a bigot. Stated that this book allows her to travel into the world of an African-American family and to understand what it is like. Asked that the book remain where it is shelved.

Lisa Rustemeyer – Covington, LA. Stated she has faith that the readers of the book will recognize it as the work of art that it is. Stated the book is an accurate representation of how young African-American women felt during those times. Asked for it to remain in the adult section.

Amy Cucullu – Stated that it is an adult book and should stay in the adult section. Stated that most children would not choose to read a Toni Morrison book on their own.

Roxanne Newman – Mandeville, LA. Stated she read the book in junior high and no harm was caused. Asked for the book to remain in the adult section.

Jamie Foster – Abita Springs, LA. Stated that the issue is not about protecting children; it is about bigots who see the library as a soft target and want to move us back in time. Stated that the Board has the backbone to protect our society. Stated that libraries are important bastions of information.

Discussion: B. Taylor stated the book is from a different time and provides a good lesson for today. She stated she is in favor of keeping the book shelved in Adult Fiction. J. Airey addressed the comment about his voting decisions opposing the librarians' recommendations on the previous titles. He stated that his votes were acceptable and were based on the options given to him by the librarians. Stated that *The Bluest Eye* has some uncomfortable passages in it, but no one is standing in the middle of the library reading the book out loud as a performance in the library.

Vote: J. Airey moved to affirm the committee's decision for *The Bluest Eye* to remain shelved in the Adult Fiction collection. It was seconded by A. Shaw. Roll call vote:

Jake Airey – Yes
Ann Shaw – Yes
Becky Taylor – Yes
Carmen Butler – Yes

Motion carried. The committee's recommendation is affirmed.

I. Resolution regarding surplus property

Discussion: T. DiMaggio reported that the Maintenance Department has identified several items that are old and in working order, but are no longer needed. A resolution declaring the items surplus is required so the items can be donated to Goodwill or the Habitat for Humanity ReStore. The items are listed on the resolution and include a refrigerator and various tools.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

Vote: J. Airey moved to adopt the resolution to declare certain movable property surplus and authorize its disposition. It was seconded by A. Shaw. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried.

J. Executive Session for the Annual Evaluation of the Director pursuant to La R.S. 42:17(1). 2/3 majority vote of members present required to go into executive session

A. Shaw moved to go into executive session for the Annual Evaluation of the Director. It was seconded by C. Butler. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried. The Board left the room and went into executive session.

The Board returned to the room. A. Shaw moved to return from executive session. It was seconded by C. Butler. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried.

Public Comment:

Sonnet Ireland – Slidell, LA. Stated that Kelly LaRocca has the patience of Job. Stated that these issues are also happening in other parishes, but not every Director has held up as well as Kelly has. Stated that Kelly has been respectful to others who have accused her of horrendous things and has done her best to protect the library and the 1st Amendment. Stated that Kelly has done a fantastic job of showing grace under pressure, has gone above and beyond, and has done more than the average Library Director should have to do.

Discussion: B. Taylor stated that Kelly has exhibited professionalism and grace beyond measure over the past year. Stated that the library has accomplished a lot during this time period and Kelly has fulfilled many of the Board's goals for the library system. She stated the Board is lucky to have Kelly.

A. Shaw agreed with B. Taylor's comments and stated that the library is fortunate to have had Kelly's leadership through COVID and the recent issues. Stated that Kelly has led with grace, dignity, and professionalism.

J. Airey commented that Kelly has more patience than he does. He stated that he debated whether or not to vote or abstain on this due to being on both the Parish Council and the Library Board, but will be voting with the other board members.

C. Butler stated that she feels the same as everyone has previously expressed. Stated that Kelly is always keeping the Board informed of everything happening. She appreciates the way Kelly has handled everything and encouraged her to keep up the good work.

Vote: A. Shaw moved to increase the Library Director's hourly pay from Step 6.5 \$51.46 per hour to Step 7.5 \$53.00 per hour beginning March 2023. The resulting increase equals an annual salary of \$110,240. It was seconded by C. Butler. J. Airey noted that the total is below other peers' salaries, as well as below department heads' salaries in Parish Government. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried.

3. OLD BUSINESS

A. Strategic Planning Committee

K. LaRocca reported that Carson Block and Susan Kent presented a draft of the mission, vision, and goals that resulted from community engagement in 2022. Feedback given will be incorporated so that the Board can consider the adoption of the Strategic Plan at our April meeting.

B. St. Tammany Library Foundation

K. LaRocca reported that the Foundation Board has new leadership. Chase Villeret is President, Herb Hamilton is first Vice-President, and Mary Lee is second Vice-President. New board members are Scott Scheffy and Rhonda Simmons. The Foundation is gearing up for their 6th annual Distinguished Speaker event on April 26, 2023, at the Beau Chene Country Club. Tickets will go on sale to the public next week. The Foundation received \$12,145 in sponsorship donations and pledges from 32 different businesses and individuals for the event.

C. Friends of the Library Report

B. Taylor reported that Library Administration asked the Friends of the Slidell Library (FSL) to undertake a project to enhance the unpaved area at one end of the new Slidell Branch parking lot. A committee has been formed and is composed of five FSL members, three Slidell area Master Gardeners, two library representatives, and Will Afton, St. Tammany Parish County Agent. The committee met and discussed ideas such as a vegetative buffer between the parking lot and nearby neighborhood, native plants, water tolerant plants inside the bioswale to help mask the drain and piping, a sundial, and the possibility of a short paved walkway with some benches. The enhancements will not interfere with existing trees. Future meetings will focus on finalizing the scope of the project and selecting a landscape architect.

4. Public Comment

Sheryl Godwin – Stated that she was told there is bestiality in the Bible. She found reference to it in Leviticus 18:22-30. She read the verses aloud. It referenced homosexuality as a disdained sin and bestiality as a perverse act. Stated that the United States Constitution was written based on these laws.

Johanna Miner – Read excerpts from *Ishtar's Storybook Hour* aloud. Stated they are not censoring anyone, this is not a civil rights issue, and that it is about protecting the innocence of children. Stated that the first four books that were discussed are too confusing for small children, teens, and adults. Stated that the library has a Marxist agenda and takes orders from Emily Drabinski. Stated that the Board and Library Administration will be fired and removed.

Shawnah Snyder – Read public comment from David Cogle aloud. Stated that the Parish Council refuses to give him the opportunity to speak to them. Spoke of the resolution passed at the previous meeting not being enough to protect children. Stated that the Board should have passed a resolution similar to Lafayette's library board.

Meara McNitt – Stated that many of her peers have transitioned since high school. Wishes she had access to books like this when she was younger, as she would have been nicer to her classmates. Stated transgender people are not a rarity in St. Tammany Parish.

Darby Mulkey – Mandeville, LA. Stated that it is alarming that anyone would be against *The Bluest Eye*. Stated that rape and molestation does happen to people under 18 and it is detrimental not to allow access to those materials. Stated that access to these books helps children who have been through the unimaginable.

Ruth Terry Sipos – Abita Springs, LA. Spoke against having a parent resource shelf. Stated it is a slippery slope and will cause shame, separation, prejudice. Asked the Board to give it more thought. Thanked the Board for all they do.

David Ziegler – Pearl River, LA. Spoke of allowing children to access books that damage them. Spoke of the Attorney General's campaign against the issues being discussed and the laws being introduced to the legislature. Stated this is not going away.

Marlon Peters – Slidell, LA. Stated he has not come across an offensive book, and if he had he would not threaten library staff's jobs, form groups and speak to politicians such as Jeff Landry about it. Stated this is fascism. Stated he does not need help raising his children. Supports keeping the books on the shelves.

5. Adjournment

There being no further business, a motion to adjourn was made by J. Airey and seconded by A. Shaw. The motion carried.



Mary Reneau, Secretary