

**St. Tammany Parish Library  
Board of Control Special Meeting  
June 16, 2023  
Slidell Library  
555 Robert Blvd.  
Slidell, LA 70458  
9:00 A.M.**

**MINUTES**

The meeting was scheduled as a Rules and Regulations Committee meeting. Due to a quorum of the Library Board of Control, the meeting became a special board meeting.

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

Present: Jake Airey, Bill McHugh, Anthony Parr, Mary Reneau, Ann Shaw, Becky Taylor

Absent: Carmen Butler

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. This is a special board meeting with only one item on the agenda.

**1. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Challenged Materials Process**

**Discussion:** K. LaRocca explained that the purpose of the meeting is to discuss any changes that might be made to the challenged materials process. She stated that there are currently over 150 items that have been challenged. She stated that there are opinions, suggestions, and concerns from all sides of the issue. K. LaRocca noted that the meeting was originally scheduled to be a Rules and Regulations Committee meeting where the committee would review the current policy, other standard policies, and discusses what may work for us. The committee does the work and brings the revised policies to the Board for approval.

K. LaRocca reviewed the current policy for Section 407: Statements of Concern about Library Resources. She expanded upon the process of forming committees to review challenged materials. The committee reviews the material in its entirety, creates a book résumé that includes a brief synopsis, reviews of the material from standard evaluation guides, topical information concerning the material, circulation information, information about holdings in other public libraries, awards received, biographical information about the author/producer, and Library of Congress Subject Headings. She explained the previous decision and appeal process. She noted that the current revised process changes the committee's decision to a recommendation to the Board. In an effort to be as transparent as possible, the Board then reviews the materials and makes a final decision during an open public meeting.

K. LaRocca explained that it is a lengthy process because not only does the committee read each book in its entirety, but so does each board member. She explained that the Board has been reviewing a mix of children, teen, and adult books, so the review schedule has been fairly easy. We will soon be finished reviewing children's books and will have all adult books left to review, which are much longer and take more time to read. At that point, it will not be possible to review 4 to 5 books at once.

K. LaRocca discussed Section 409: Access to Library Materials by Minors, as it also relates to Statements of Concern. Section 409 allows the Board to restrict minors from accessing inappropriate materials by establishing an area behind the circulation desk for restricted materials. K. LaRocca also noted the resolution from December 13, 2022 which states that every item that receives a statement of concern is temporarily stored in a restricted area behind the circulation desk while being reviewed. K. LaRocca provided the Board with printed copies of the public comment received prior to the meeting. The Board discussed their concerns and ideas.

J. Airey suggested the committee reports and recommendations be done in a public meeting and if the complainant does not agree, they can appeal the decision for Board review. He stated in some instances the committee has recommended what the patron wants, and the book unnecessarily goes to the Board for review. Suggested that members of the public could be part of the initial review committee. Stated that there needs to be more engagement from the complainants or they can have someone speak for them. He noted that there are 30 titles that have been challenged and are only available for download. Due to the library's tiered card system, they can only be checked out by adults and those with unrestricted library cards. He suggested that challenges on those types of books be rejected due to the items already having proper restrictions in place for accessing online and they are not physically available in the

library. Spoke about the Attorney General stating that these books are not obscene and complainants using the R.S. 14:91.11 obscenity laws as the basis of their challenge. Stated that we cannot continue to have board meetings that go on for four hours twice a month, as it is just too much.

A. Parr suggested placing the challenged books in an area of each branch that is uniform across the Parish in an effort to be consistent and transparent. He also suggested having pull cards or placeholder books in place of a challenged book on the shelf. This offers spontaneous discovery for parents looking for books on a certain topic. Stated that it is important to have patrons' views respected. Spoke of the online Statement of Concern form and how it is being exploited and abused in a way where there is no data, integrity, and validity. Suggested that submitting a paper copy in person would be appropriate and would open the door for dialog with patrons who have concerns.

B. Taylor stated that statements of concern from organizations should not be accepted, as organizations do not have library cards. Statements should only be accepted from verified residents of St. Tammany Parish. Complainants should read and review the entire work, as the staff and Board are doing a lot of work based on their concern. Fraudulent statements with made-up addresses and names should not be considered. Stated that 60% of the remaining challenged books are adult novels, which is a lot of reading. Suggests streamlining the process as much as possible. Stated that citizens have the right to register their legitimate concerns. Stated that the Board is volunteering their valuable time to this and frivolous complaints must be reduced.

A. Shaw suggested having the statements of concern notarized. She is concerned about books that do not violate R.S. 14:91.11 still being challenged and using that statute as the basis for their concern. Suggested that the Board consider not accepting those types of statements.

B. McHugh spoke about the challenged books being restricted behind the circulation desk while they are under review. A letter was sent to the library from the Tulane Law Clinic. B. McHugh read the letter aloud. He asked for the letter to be included in the minutes of this meeting. The letter is scanned and included in the record. The letter states that restricting the books while under review violates the Constitution because it removes protected works from the shelves. B. McHugh stated that the books should remain on the shelves unless a decision is made to remove them after review. A. Parr asked if restricting books opens the library up to lawsuits. B. McHugh stated that the Tulane Law Clinic says that it exposes the library and taxpayers to legal

liability. B. McHugh stated that a book could be behind the desk for three years, based on the rate we are going.

J. Airey stated that a letter by law students is not really a legal opinion that we should base our decisions on. Stated that what was said in the letter is not entirely correct. Stated that the policy has been in place for a while and we have not been sued. Stated that the library board does have discretion on what books can be restricted. Agreed that the process needs to be streamlined to move forward quicker.

B. McHugh stated that the research may have been done by law students, but the letter is signed by Katie Schwartzmann, the Director of the Tulane First Amendment Law Clinic.

M. Reneau stated that removing or denying access to reading materials as a public library is censorship, which is illegal. Stated that the library is breaking the law.

K. LaRocca stated that the Board's suggestions along with public comment received by email and in-person will be reviewed and another Rules and Regulations Committee meeting will be scheduled to review potential changes. The next committee meeting was tentatively scheduled for June 27, 2023 at 10:00 AM in the Parish Council Chambers. If there are four or more board members in attendance, the meeting will once again become a special board meeting. Both versions of the agenda will be posted 24 hours or more in advance.

A. Shaw stated that it is unfortunate that we were not able to have a regular Rules and Regulations Committee meeting due to having a quorum of the Board. She stated the committee meetings are very constructive meetings with library staff in attendance and their input is an important part of the process. K. LaRocca clarified that committee members will be made aware of the possible committee meeting and are invited to attend. All meeting dates and agendas are posted on the website.

E. Couvillon responded to disruption from the public in attendance. She stated that all meetings are posted in accordance with the open meetings law, which requires 24 hours' notice at the site of the meeting and on the website.

B. McHugh asked K. LaRocca to inform the audience of the email address that is available for the public to contact the Board with input. K. LaRocca stated the email address is lboc@stpl.us.

**Public Comment:**

Mike Sims – Slidell, LA. Spoke of sex offenders not being allowed in the library and not allowed to have the materials that the library has for public display in their possession. Stated the library is generating future sex offenders by exposing people to pornography.

Thomas Abney – Slidell, LA. Stated it is shameful for the council to have allowed these books to be on the shelves. Spoke of sex addiction. Stated that children are most vulnerable. Stated that Ted Bundy started out reading these types of books and became a serial killer. Quoted a Bible verse aloud.

Kitty Carmody – Slidell, LA. Stated that it is a small group who have launched this campaign of overwhelming the library system. Spoke of it being an abuse of the system and a waste of resources and time. Spoke of people cutting and pasting cherry-picked information into the Statements of Concern.

Roland Gallatin – Stated the Statement of Concern process is a mockery because everyone knows the outcome of the meetings. Stated the library should be impartial and serve the entire community without endorsing one point of view over another. Stated the Board is not serving the conservative Republican community, which pays for the library's budget and their salary. Stated that there are no books in the collection that portray the other side of the transgender issue. Listed the following books: *Always Erin*, *Time to Think*, *Lost in Trans Nation*, *Parenting in a Transgender World*, and *Transing Our Children*. Showed a printout of B. McHugh's posts on Facebook that show comments not in favor of the Republican party and Donald Trump. Asked for the printout to be made part of the public record.

B. McHugh asked to respond. There was disruption from the public in attendance. B. Taylor stated that B. McHugh can respond after the public comment period.

Tony Vespo – Slidell, LA. Stated that the Board's responsibilities and processes are quite daunting and the Board has a lot on their plate. Stated he is a combat veteran with a purple heart. Stated that when he was 16 he was very impressionable. He said he saw and partook in things that changed him not for the better. Stated some of this material is impressionable and he is concerned about young people being influenced in negative ways.

Harry Morgan – Stated this is not only a political or religious issue. Stated children cannot establish right from wrong. Asked to put the books where only adults can read them. Stated they are not burning or banning books.

Greg Johnson – Stated that kids have restrictions on R-rated movies and buying alcohol and cigarettes, yet are allowed into the Adult section of the library. Stated that Warren Montgomery said that graphic novels are not against the law because they are cartoons and it is a loophole in the law. Stated that the fact that the library is using the law to defend the books is disgusting.

Patricia White – Slidell, LA. Stated that it is ridiculous that the entire work must be read in order to determine if it is appropriate. Stated that her children are no longer allowed to go to the library. Stated that the books should be completely removed from the library, not just moved to a restricted section. Stated that the library could be breeding new pedophiles in the community.

Milton Beard – Lacombe, LA. Stated he is a Christian and lives his life based on faith. Spoke of a story Jesus told about a woman caught in adultery and asked those without sin to cast the first stone. Stated that we are all sinners. Stated that he is praying for the Board and knows they have a hard job.

James Payne – Slidell, LA. Spoke of teaching theology to children. Stated we need to put material in front of children that will help them grow up with a sound mind. Spoke of material not in line with the Bible. Spoke of the nation being founded on Christian principles.

Jerry Binder – Stated that he was Council Chair of the St. Tammany Parish Council last year. Stated that he met with K. LaRocca about the public concerns. Spoke of the Children's Internet Protection Act that called for filters to block adult content on public computers. Stated it was ruled as censorship, then was overruled by the Supreme Court. He said he related that situation to books when speaking to K. LaRocca about a restricted section in the library. Stated we have to protect minors and have the methods to do so.

Mike Smith – Slidell, LA. Stated he is the Parish Councilman for District 9. Recommends using reserved rooms for the materials in question. Stated he has seen reserved rooms in many libraries that he has visited throughout the country. The reserved rooms house and protect valuable material and controversial material that might be stolen. Stated that children do not have full constitutional rights and a reserve room would not infringe their rights.

Johanna Miner – Spoke about the Pride displays at the Madisonville Library last summer. Stated that the library does not care about the public or the children. Spoke about the Board not wanting to hear scripture during public comment. Stated that is censorship. Stated that less than 1% of the community are in opposition to restricting materials. Stated she is not burning books, she is protecting the children of the community.

B. McHugh responded to the earlier comments made by R. Gallatin. B. McHugh addressed the comments on his Facebook page. He spoke of being a father, talked about his past involvement in organizations, stated he is an Episcopal Christian, wrote for the St. Tammany Farmer for 8 years, and has never been accused of inaccurate reporting or being biased. Stated he covered the library board for 8 years while writing for the St. Tammany Farmer. Stated he has likely attended more board meetings than anyone in the room besides the board members. Stated he holds the library and the Board in the highest regard. Stated he is not imposing his political views onto the library. Stated that no one's politics, including his own, will have an influence on his decision-making for the Library Board.

## 2. Adjournment

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

  
Mary Reneau, Secretary