

**St. Tammany Parish Library  
Board of Control Meeting  
September 28, 2023  
St. Tammany Parish Council Chambers  
21490 Koop Dr.,  
Mandeville, LA 70471  
10:00 A.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, Bill McHugh, Becky Taylor

**Absent:** Anthony Parr, Ann Shaw

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

B. Taylor explained that the meeting would be abbreviated, as board member Jake Airey had to leave by 11:00 a.m. B. Taylor suggested reordering the agenda to ensure that important items that require votes are addressed. The suggested new order of agenda items: 1. Act 436, 2. Statement of Concern Decision – *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, 3. Statement of Concern – *The Deep and Dark Blue*, 4. Health Insurance Update, 5. Financial Reports, 6. Approval of the minutes from the meetings held on July 13, 2023 and August 21, 2023, and 7. Director's Report.

B. McHugh moved to reorder the agenda items. It was seconded by J. Airey. All were in favor, none were opposed, and two were absent. Motion carried.

**1. Act 436 – Card System Update and Adoption**

K. LaRocca explained that due to Act 436, the library formalized the card system for Board adoption. K. LaRocca reviewed changes and modifications that were made to comply exactly with Act 436. Under *Section 209. Limits of Library Use*, the following was added: "All items must be checked out on a library card in order to be used outside of the library buildings." The ages of minor children with a library card were specified as ages 5-17 years old.

K. LaRocca reviewed the card types by order of most restrictive to least restrictive. The card types are Juvenile Full Restriction Card without Digital Resource Access, Juvenile Full Restriction Card with Digital Resource Access, Juvenile Semi Restriction Card without Digital Resource Access, Juvenile Semi Restriction Card with Digital Resource Access, Juvenile Card, and Juvenile Unrestricted Card. These options expand on the card types that the library has had in place since November 2022. K. LaRocca clarified that Act 436 was enacted as LA R.S. 25:225 and is noted as such in the card type descriptions.

K. LaRocca stated that the only title that will need to be moved due to the restrictions under the Juvenile Full Restriction Card without Digital Resource Access card type is *Sex Is a Funny Word* because of the textual descriptions of masturbation.

K. LaRocca explained that due to the restrictions of the Juvenile Semi Restriction Card without Digital Resource Access card type, we will need to move Young Adult (YA) Non-Fiction from the Adult section to the YA section. K. LaRocca clarified that nothing qualifying as sexually explicit as defined by LA R.S. 25:225 will be moved to the YA section.

K. LaRocca noted that the Juvenile Card and the Juvenile Unrestricted Card have the least amount of restrictions. Because of this, it is specified that the Adult collections may contain material that has been deemed sexually explicit by the Library Board of Control as defined by LA R.S. 25:225. It is also specified that the Adult collections may contain material that could be considered sexually explicit as defined by LA R.S. 25:225.

K. LaRocca noted that there are other updates that will have to be made to comply with Act 436, such as updating the Collection Development Policy. The first step is for the Board to officially adopt the card system.

B. McHugh asked what the difference is between a Juvenile Unrestricted card and an Adult card. K. LaRocca explained that the only difference is that an adult has to choose the Juvenile Unrestricted card type for their minor child. An Adult card is automatically given to a person 18 years of age or older.

**Public Comment:**

Sonnet Ireland – Slidell, LA. Stated that the card system update is a good solution for Act 436. Acknowledged that there are lots of moving parts to the process and she appreciates the amount of work and thought that has gone into implementing the changes.

**Discussion:**

B. McHugh suggested an amendment to the document on page 1. Asked for the words “and responsibility” to be added to the sentence so that it reads “Parents have the right and responsibility to guide and direct the reading, listening, and viewing choices of their minor children.”

J. Airey asked E. Couvillon her legal opinion on the changes. E. Couvillon stated that she has been working with K. LaRocca on interpreting Act 436, as well as reviewing Attorney General Jeff Landry’s interpretation of the Act. E. Couvillon believes the card system updates comply with Act 436.

**Vote:** B. McHugh moved to adopt the Card System Update as amended. It was seconded by C. Butler. All were in favor, none were opposed, and two were absent. Motion carried.

**2. Statement of Concern Decision – *A Court of Thorns and Roses***

K. LaRocca presented the Statement of Concern (SOC) for the book *A Court of Thorns and Roses* by Sarah Maas. The statement was submitted by Connie Phillips, representing the St. Tammany Parish Library Accountability Project. K. LaRocca read the statement aloud.

The recommended action by C. Phillips is: “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.”

Reason given: “Content violates the state obscenity statues [sic], 2021 Louisiana Laws, Revised Statutes, Title 14 - Criminal Law. Summary of Concerns: This book contains graphic violence; explicit sexual nudity; obscene sexual activities; and mild profanity.”

K. LaRocca reviewed the book résumé which includes the publisher’s summary, number of print copies STPL owns (4), total circulation on all print copies (212), total circulation on all E-books (375), total circulation on all E-audiobooks (523), comparable library system statistics, reviews by *Publishers Weekly*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *School Library Journal*, *Booklist*, *Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*, and *Hornbook Guide to Children*. Also noted are awards and lists featuring this title. A total of 3,011 public libraries across the nation own copies of the book. The title is shelved in the Adult Fiction section of the library with Fic Maas as the call number.

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.

Since the complainant cites the 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 LA 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.

Summary of Committee Report: The book does not primarily consist of or is primarily devoted to the description of the sexual conduct outlined in LA R.S. 14:91.11. The sexual conduct is a small part of the story and mirrors the emotional connection between the characters. The language used to describe sexual conduct is not explicit. Euphemisms are used and the language is more flowery than erotic.

After the committee meeting, this title was also reviewed by Library Administration in light of Act 436. Although there is sexual conduct described in the book, because the item was originally located in the Adult section of the library, the library's card system allows parents to choose whether their minor child can check out this book. Library Administration sees no conflict with its original location and the new law.

Options for the Board: Return the book to the Adult Fiction section, keep the book behind the circulation desk, or remove the book from the library.

Committee Recommendation: The committee believes that the book is not harmful to minors and does not violate LA R.S. 14:91.11, and should remain in the Adult Fiction section.

**Public Comment:**

Rachel Rhodes – Defended the book and stated that it is an adult fantasy novel, not a children's book. Stated that the book has a dark theme, but it teaches girls not to justify or rationalize abuse. Spoke of fairy tales having dark themes and how those stories teach lessons about survival. Asked for the book to remain in the library.

Joan Simon – Covington, LA. Stated that there are lessons to be learned from the book and that if it were a movie it would likely be PG-13. Spoke of the lesson that bad boys should not be glorified. Stated that sex is mentioned, but it is not pornographic or explicit. Asked for the book to remain in the library.

Gary Lacoste – Abita Springs, LA. Asked for clarification on whether or not currently challenged books and newly purchased books will automatically be moved to the Adult section if they contain content that violates Act 436. K. LaRocca explained that new items added to the collection fall under the Collection Development Policy, which is a separate policy that the Board will need to adopt to comply with Act 436. K. LaRocca explained that the SOCs for the books that are currently challenged cite LA R.S. 14:91.11 as a concern, not Act 436, therefore

the Board will still review and decide on those titles. K. LaRocca reiterated that the only book they have identified that needs to be moved to the Adult section that was previously challenged is *Sex Is a Funny Word*. G. Lacoste noted that the board meeting was rescheduled for during the day and he hopes that was not done with the intent to reduce the number of people in attendance. B. Taylor explained that a quorum of four or more members of the Library Board of Control is required to hold a meeting where library business is being voted upon. J. Airey stated that he had to work the night of the originally scheduled meeting and could not attend.

Rebecca Bohm – Mandeville, LA. Stated that the book is in the Adult section and cannot be checked out without parental consent. Stated that so far there has been a burning sign on someone's private property in Abita Springs and someone from the Accountability Group ambushed someone on Highway 59 outside of a Parish Council meeting. Stated that the Board needs to stop appeasing them and their invalid complaints.

Lisa Rustemeyer – Covington, LA. Stated she did not read the book, but noted that the complainant cited only a few pages as objectionable in a 450-page book. Spoke of the 200+ other patrons who have checked out the book without a complaint. Stated that it is a best-seller and in the Adult section. Asked for the book to remain in the library.

**Discussion:**

B. Taylor stated that the book does not violate LA R.S. 14:91.11. Stated she is in favor of the book remaining in the Adult collection. B. McHugh stated that the book is an allegorical fantasy and explores what it is like to develop an understanding of someone we once feared because we knew nothing about them other than what we have been told by others.

**Vote:** B. McHugh moved to affirm the committee's recommendation for *A Court of Thorns and Roses* to remain in the Adult Fiction section. It was seconded by C. Butler. All were in favor, none were opposed, and two were absent. Motion carried.

**3. Statement of Concern Decision – *The Deep and Dark Blue***

K. LaRocca presented the Statement of Concern for the book *The Deep and Dark Blue* by Niki Smith. The statement was submitted by Connie Phillips, representing the St. Tammany Parish Library Accountability Project. K. LaRocca read the statement aloud.

The recommended action by C. Phillips is: "Move to minor restricted area of the library. Where kids cannot have access without an adult checking out the material. This book should be

shelved in the adult section of the library and identified as an Adult Book not a Young Adult of Juvenile [sic] Book.”

Reason given: “Not suitable for children in St. Tammany Parish See La. R.S. 14:91:11 [sic]. The material is offensive to the average adult applying contemporary community standard. This is a typical book from the ALA grooming agenda causing 12 year old children to question their gender.” Cited excerpts from the book.

K. LaRocca reviewed the book résumé which includes the publisher’s summary, number of print copies STPL owns (2), total circulation on all print copies (17), comparable library system statistics, reviews by *Booklist*, *School Library Journal*, and *Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*. This title was a Lambda Literary Award finalist. A total of 733 public libraries across the nation own copies of the book. The title is shelved in the Juvenile Graphic Novels section at STPL with J GN Smit as the call number.

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.

Since the complainant cites the 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 LA 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.

Summary of Committee Report: This title was purchased in response to a patron request. The book contains no sex acts or sexual conduct in text or illustrations. There is no discussion of sex or sexuality in the book. The book contains mild violence that is implied but not shown. The treatment of gender identity is age-appropriate and there is no mention of romance, sexual identity, or sexual activity. The book has artistic value as an excellent example of a graphic novel for middle grade readers.

After the committee meeting, this title was also reviewed by Library Administration in light of Act 436. There is no sexual conduct described in the book. Library Administration sees no conflict with its original location and the new law.

Options for the Board: Return the book to Juvenile Graphic Novels, move the book to Young Adult Graphic Novels, move the book to Adult Non-fiction under the graphic novel call number, continue to shelve the book behind the circulation desk, or remove it from the library.

Committee Recommendation: Book should remain in the collection and is appropriate in its current location in Juvenile Graphic Novels. The main characters are not yet teens and the style and content of the book are aimed at middle grade readers, grades 4-6.

**Public Comment:**

Rachel Rhodes – Gave a brief summary of the novel. Stated there is controversy about the book because it is about a young trans girl coming out. Stated there is nothing sexual or pornographic in the book. Stated it is an attempt to remove LGBTQ+ books from the shelves. Asked for the book to remain on the shelves, not in a restricted area.

Gary Lacoste – Abita Springs, LA. Agreed that there is no sex in the book. Stated that the concern is that the topic of defining one's identity is confusing for really young children. Stated he does not see the book as harmful, but he hopes the Board will look at the book from a moral standpoint. Stated he does not want kids exposed to gender-leading books.

Lisa Rustemeyer – Covington, LA. Gave a brief summary of the novel. Stated there is no sexually explicit material in the book. Stated that 1% of the population is transgender and there are approximately 217 titles that represent that population. That is less than .04% of the library collection. Spoke of a recent protest at the Covington Branch where a man held a sign that said, "Error has no rights, only truth has rights." Stated that demonstrates the intent to remove rights from people they see as "other."

**Discussion:**

B. McHugh stated that it is a strange book, but is interesting and completely harmless. Stated it is cataloged in the appropriate age group in the collection.

**Vote:** B. McHugh moved to affirm the committee's decision for *The Deep and Dark Blue* to remain in the Juvenile Graphic Novels section. It was seconded by C. Butler. All were in favor, none were opposed, and two were absent. Motion carried.

**4. Health Insurance Update and Reinsurance Contract for 2024 – Leon Golemi**

Leon Golemi, the library's benefit consultant, reviewed the health insurance update and reinsurance contract for 2024. L. Golemi reported that the health insurance benefits for library employees will not change for 2024. Employee contributions to the health plan will also remain the same. L. Golemi reviewed the reinsurance spreadsheet which showed details for the years 2020 through 2023 and contractual options for 2024. L. Golemi recommends selecting Zurich as the reinsurance carrier for 2024, as it is the best option for the library, the health plan, and the employees plus their dependants.

**Public Comment:** There was no public comment.

**Vote:** B. McHugh moved to accept L. Golemi's recommendation to select Zurich as the library's reinsurance carrier for the health plan. It was seconded by C. Butler. All were in favor, none were opposed, and two were absent. Motion carried.

J. Airey exited the meeting at this time. As a result, there was no longer a quorum, and no further votes could be taken. The board meeting ended as per Louisiana's Open Meetings Law.

Voting on the minutes and the financial reports will be added to the next regular meeting of the Library Board of Control. K. LaRocca presented the Director's Report, as no voting was required.



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Rebecca Taylor, Board President