

PUBLIC COMMENT – SEPTEMBER 28, 2023
MEETING OF THE ST TAMMANY PARISH LIBRARY BOARD OF CONTROL

Please print all information. Please return to designated library staff member.
Please use one form for each agenda item you wish to comment on.

I request to speak on the following topic/Agenda Item #: 2A
(Your name will be called to approach the Board to speak.)

FULL NAME: Sonnet Ireland

ADDRESS: [REDACTED] Slidell, LA

TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED] EMAIL: [REDACTED]

This information is a P

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___ **I do not wish to speak** but would like my written comment below added to the public record of this meeting. (Your name will **not** be called to approach the Board to speak.)

Agenda Item #: 2A

FULL NAME: Lisa Rustenberg

ADDRESS: Covington

TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED] EMAIL: [REDACTED]

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**NATIONAL
COALITION
AGAINST
CENSORSHIP**

**KIDS'
RIGHT
TO READ**

~~See to Attorney ward~~
~~moved~~
~~AcF, career books - accessible~~
~~Some platform will comply -~~
~~otherwise~~

September 21, 2023

Library Board of Control
St. Tammany Parish Library
1112 W. 21st Ave
Covington, LA 70433

Dear Board Members,

The National Coalition Against Censorship is an alliance of nonprofit groups dedicated to protecting freedom of expression. We write to you today out of concern that your library's current policies on book challenges encourage meritless, politicized challenges to valuable materials and result in harmful limitation of access to library books. We recommend specific improvements to the library's challenge policies in order to create a better and fairer process for reviewing book challenges, and to reduce the unnecessary censorship of material caused by the current backlog of challenges.

As we understand it, over the past year the St. Tammany Parish Library received over 150 challenges to library books and has restricted access to every one of those books while challenges are reviewed. This makes the default outcome of any book challenge – no matter how meritless – an immediate restriction to the challenged materials for all students. This is clearly the wrong default as a matter of pure due process and fairness - and worse, clearly encourages the filing of meritless challenges in the hope that a book will be at least temporarily restricted while under review.

We are particularly concerned because your website says that the library has only reviewed a small fraction of the challenged books,¹ which suggests that reviewing the entire list – just from the past year! – may take years. The website also indicates that almost all of the small number of challenges that have been adjudicated thus far have been rejected.² Hence, your own records demonstrate that under your current policy, access to valuable learning materials has been - and will continue to be - restricted for no good reason. We strongly urge you to flip this default and continue to provide access to books undergoing a challenge review. The alternative, as your patrons are currently experiencing, encourages a deprivation of knowledge by those who seek to impede access to ideas they do not like.

Similarly, segregating books during the review process is problematic because such restrictions also encourage meritless challenges in the hope that any challenge will result in reduced access to library materials, for at least some period of time.

¹ "Materials under Review." *St. Tammany Parish Library*

www.sttammanylibrary.org/library-policies/challenged-materials-policy/materials-under-review/.

² *Ibid.*

Segregation can serve as a library's scarlet letter – it influences how readers read and understand texts and can stigmatize the viewpoints and ideas expressed by those books. Segregation can discourage readers from discovering books that they might find stimulating or educational and may have a chilling effect on librarians who are likely to avoid purchasing books that could be challenged.

For all of the above reasons, many library policies include an explicit requirement that access to books remain unrestricted during the reconsideration process. We encourage you to adopt similar policies. By doing so, you can ensure that St. Tammany Parish Library is fulfilling its stated goal of providing "a collection that supports the broad range of interests and diverse backgrounds of the citizens of St. Tammany Parish,"³ rather than catering to the political views of a vocal minority.

Thank you for your time and attention to this letter. Please let us know if we can be of any further assistance in this matter; my contact information at NCAC is listed below.

Sincerely,



Lee Rowland
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship
Lee@ncac.org

Co-signed by: American Booksellers for Free Expression
The Authors Guild
Children's and Young Adult Books Committee, PEN America
Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

A project of the National
Coalition Against Censorship

CO-SPONSORED BY

American Booksellers for
Free Expression

National Council of Teachers
of English

³ "Statements of Concern about Library Resources Policy." *St. Tammany Parish Library*
www.sttammanylibrary.org/library-policies/challenged-materials-policy/.

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I request to speak on the following topic/Agenda Item #: E
(Your name will be called to approach the Board to speak.)

FULL NAME: Rachel ~~Chavez~~ Rhodes

ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED] MAIL: [REDACTED]

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I request to speak on the following topic/Agenda Item #: E

(Your name will be called to approach the Board to speak.)

FULL NAME: Joan Sima

ADDRESS: [REDACTED] Covington 70439

TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED] EMAIL: [REDACTED]

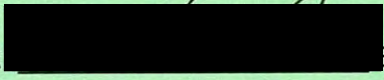
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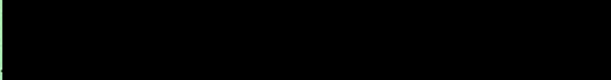
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I request to speak on the following topic/Agenda Item #: E
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FULL NAME: Gary Lacoste

ADDRESS: Abita Springs

TELEPHONE NUMBER: 

EMAIL: 

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I request to speak on the following topic/Agenda Item #: E
(Your name will be called to approach the Board to speak.)

Support books staying on shelf in Adult
section since card system prevents
minor checking it out without parent consent

FULL NAME: Rebecca Bohm

ADDRESS: [REDACTED] Mandeville

TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED] EMAIL: _____

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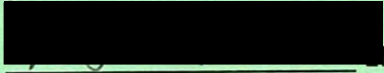
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I request to speak on the following topic/Agenda Item #: 2 E
(Your name will be called to approach the Board to speak.)

FULL NAME: Lisa Rustmege

ADDRESS: COV

TELEPHONE NUMBER: 

MAIL: 

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Agenda Item #: **F**

I did not read this book I confess. I doubt Connie did either.
I believe it is catalogued in the Adult Section. Based on
this the book should not have a statement of concern considered.

FULL NAME: Rebecca Bohm St Tammany library card
ADDRESS: [REDACTED] Mandeville LA System
TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED] MAIL: [REDACTED] prevents children from accessing

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this book without parental consent. →

^{SPL 09/11}
Any book in the adult section should not even be considered. Whoever submits the complaint should be told not considering based on catalog system. Then they can appeal if they want to.

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I **do not wish to speak** but would like my written comment below added to the public record of this meeting. (Your name will **not** be called to approach the Board to speak.)

Agenda Item #: E

Please keep Court of Thorns on the shelf!

FULL NAME: Laura Dinopolis
ADDRESS: [REDACTED] Covington LA [REDACTED]
TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED] EMAIL: [REDACTED]

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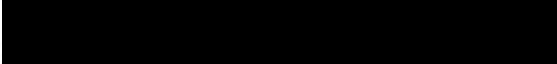
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Agenda Item #: 2E

FULL NAME: Lisa Rusteneyer

ADDRESS: Covington

TELEPHONE NUMBER:  EMAIL: 

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Agenda Item #: 2E

A Court of Thorns is an adult series appropriately placed in the adult section. It does not need to be placed in a restricted area.

FULL NAME: Barbara Mamoulides

ADDRESS: [REDACTED] Mandeville

TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED] EMAIL: [REDACTED]

2

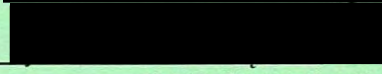

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✓ I request to speak on the following topic/Agenda Item #: F
(Your name will be called to approach the Board to speak.)

FULL NAME: Rachel Rhodes

ADDRESS: 

TELEPHONE NUMBER:  EMAIL: 

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___ I request to speak on the following topic/Agenda Item #: 2F
(Your name will be called to approach the Board to speak.)

FULL NAME: Lise Ruskey

ADDRESS: [REDACTED] Cov, LA

TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED] EMAIL: [REDACTED]

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I do not wish to speak but would like my written comment below added to the public record of this meeting. (Your name will **not** be called to approach the Board to speak.)

Agenda Item #: F

Please keep Deep and Dark Blue
on the shelf.

FULL NAME: Laura Dinapolis

ADDRESS: [REDACTED] Covington LA

TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED] EMAIL: [REDACTED]

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Agenda Item #: F

I read Beyond Dark Blue and feel it is
cataloged appropriately. As I read the book I kept
waiting for the graphic sex, the "afternoon part" and

FULL NAME: Rebecca Bohm

ADDRESS: [Redacted] Mandeville LA

TELEPHONE NUMBER: [Redacted] EMAIL: _____

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was quite disappointed.
LOL - the book should return to the shelves.
Thank you -

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Agenda Item #: 2 F

Deep and Dark Blue should remain in the juvenile graphic novel section. It is an appropriate book for readers of that age group.

FULL NAME: Barbara Mamoulides

ADDRESS: [REDACTED] Mandeville

TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED] EMAIL: [REDACTED]

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Agenda Item #: 2 E

FULL NAME: Lisa Rastemeyer

ADDRESS: Covington

TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED] EMAIL: [REDACTED]

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Agenda Item #: EFF

E - This is an adult book, why is this being challenged?

I watched what my kids read, listened to, watched. Parents do your job at your own house.

FULL NAME: Carolyn Rault

ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED] EMAIL: [REDACTED]

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X I **do not** wish to speak but would like my written comment below added to the public record of this meeting. (Your name will **not** be called to approach the Board to speak.)

Agenda Item #: EOP

The books ~~are~~ is adult fiction. Wizard of Oz is more scary.
the Deep + Dark Blue is a children's book.
We could not even check out the book because of the challenge.

FULL NAME: Terrice Moore

ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED] EMAIL: _____

This whole situation is ridiculous!

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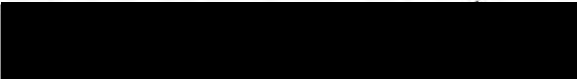


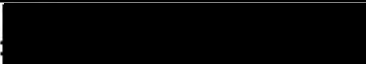

I do not wish to speak but would like my written comment below added to the public record of this meeting. (Your name will **not** be called to approach the Board to speak.)

Agenda Item #: E + F

I object to the removal of these books from the general public stacks. To target books because of the sexual content contained in them is censorship and discrimination. They do not need to be segregated to a special section other than adult section.

FULL NAME: Anna Robertson

ADDRESS: 

TELEPHONE NUMBER:  EMAIL: 

Good morning,

Unfortunately, I am not able to attend the rescheduled LBOC regular meeting that is being held today at 10:00. I understand the meeting was rescheduled due to lack of a quorum. Perhaps the next time this happens the meeting time could be at a time that is more conducive to the parish residents and library patrons. Many of us work too.

ACT 436 is an unfortunate law that is going to cost our state monetarily and leave us in our backward non-progressing status. I read an article recently that reflected the state used to be able to depend on the love of food, music and culture. And that this is no longer the case. Add to that, we are being oppressed.

The previous meeting minutes reflect much discussion already of policies/processes to meet the requirements of ACT 436. Is it time for you to trust the library experts? The people who were required to achieve the highest of education to work as professionals.

The library already has a working card system and well as other systems in place to maintain compliance.

Statements of concern: I read forms recently that I believe should have been returned to the person who filled them out. Unfortunately, there is no limit to the number of forms one person can fill out. Copying and pasting the same reasons for the concern on multiple forms implies the book hasn't been read. And yet the forms are reviewed, responded to and then the books are reviewed.

The labor intensive process is expensive.

Books should remain on the shelf. Books that are to be reviewed should be accessible for reading/reviewing in order to either support or oppose the SOC.

Respectfully,

Jean Herbers
Mandeville

From: Michaelyn Broussard [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, September 24, 2023 12:34:07 PM
To: lboc <lboc@stpl.us>
Subject: [External] Monday meeting - New Business - section D

Hello!

I have been observing the battle-of-the-books for too long. It is shocking that adults who are supposedly well-read are trying to impose their values and morality on others. The public library is designed to be inclusive for all citizens.

I, personally, use the electronic library daily. Audiobooks have given me access to 100's of books that I might not normally read. I have enjoyed a plethora of genres including historical fiction, true crime, thrillers, alternative lifestyles, and autobiographies. Each book adds to my body of knowledge by exposing me to how others think.

I have read some of Sarah J. Maas' books and find her writing unappealing overall. There are parts within her books that I just skip, but that is based on my value system, not someone else's. As an avid reader from a very early age, I have been exposed to many distasteful and disturbing parts of books but those are the parts that challenge me. Those are the parts that helped me develop my own critical thinking skills.

Every day we are all exposed to distasteful and disturbing situations such as this very topic of defending our right to choose what we read. Although I might not understand other's choices, the value I have gained from reading their struggles to overcome adverse situations is unmeasurable.

I would encourage you to continue to support our right-to-read!

Thank you,
Michaelyn Broussard

From: Jean Herbers [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, September 25, 2023 10:16:43 AM
To: lboc <lboc@stpl.us>
Subject: [External] Agenda Item E: Statement of Concern Decision –Deep and Dark Blue

Good morning,

I oppose the statement of concern written by Connie Phillips.

The SOC form reflects the following:

- * The material is offensive to the average adult applying contemporary community standards.
- * This is a typical book from the ALA grooming agenda causing 12 year old children to question their gender.

"After a terrible political coup usurps their noble house, Hawke and Grayson flee to stay alive and assume new identities, Hanna and Grayce. Desperation and chance lead them to the Communion of Blue, an order of magical women who spin the threads of reality to their will. As the twins learn more about the Communion, and themselves, they begin to hatch a plan to avenge their family and retake their royal home. While Hawke wants to return to his old life, Grayce struggles to keep the threads of her new life from unraveling, and realizes she wants to stay in the one place that will allow her to finally live as a girl."

I read this book. I was not offended. I found this graphic book to be like reading a comic book with adventurers who take over a castle. And believe it is suitable for the age group for which it is intended. There is a political coup that usurps the noble house by killing and capturing. The Communion of Blue approaches life peacefully, honors the environment and protects their communion without using weapons. They have a philosophy of acceptance.

This is a sweet story with a happy ending for everyone except for the leader of the coup.

I sincerely believe that reading the book would not make a 12 year old child question their identity. If a 12 year old decided to check this book out or look at it in the library, their parent (s) would be available to guide them.

I support leaving the book right where it was.

Interestingly, the SOC written by Ms. Phillips included the book's description of this being about a political coup.

I believe Ms. Phillips also represents a political coup. Her group has now aligned with another documented hate group, Mass Resistance.

Respectfully,

Jean Herbers
Mandeville

From: Kevin Marino [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, September 26, 2023 7:13:12 PM
To: lboc <lboc@stpl.us>
Cc: Kelly LaRocca <kelly@stpl.us>
Subject: [External] LBOC meeting 9-28-23

Good evening,

Unfortunately due to the rescheduling, I will be unable to attend the meeting in person. Please review my comments on the agenda items below and enter them into the minutes of the meeting.

2A - Act 436 update

I am ok with the proposed updates.

Is there going to be a flag in the catalogue that identifies books that have sexual content or is the section of the policy saying "materials on the X section may contain..." enough to cover the library under La. R.S. 25:22?

I will point out that I do not think this law was needed, but I understand the library needs to make changes to the policy to stay within the bounds of the law.

Because this new law requires the board to review any book that any patron thinks has sexual content, and Connie Phillips has demonstrated her ability to abuse the current system, I believe you should design and implement an expedited review process.

The review should not require the entire book to be read. Instead, it should only review the sections quoted in the statement and if the section fits the definition of depicting or describing sexual conduct, it should be determined to be "sexually explicit material" and returned to shelves. The AG's letter does not say the entire book needs to be reviewed.

If it is allowed under current law, I would suggest you review the books challenged under La. R.S. 25:225 in batches. This way only one comment period is needed for several books. This should be a clear-cut determination of either: yes it has descriptions/depictions of sexual conduct or no it does not. There is no need for lengthy reviews.

The AG did point out in his letter in question 18 that libraries do not need to relocate the materials that are under the review. With this guidance I ask again that you return the books under review back to the shelves.

The AG's letter also did not say books containing sexually explicit material need to be sequestered behind the circulation desk or otherwise held in a restricted area. As a result, I think your previous decision to hold certain graphic novels behind the circulation desk should be overturned and the complete graphic novel collection should all be located in one location.

2E - A court of thorns and roses

This book is already shelved in the adult section. Please return this book to the adult section, and return the other 152 books currently held behind the circulation desk back to the shelves.

This statement of concern is another example of Connie wasting time with frivolous statements of concerns. We should not be reviewing adult books.

Furthermore, she did not review this on her own. The quoted sections are taken directly from booklooks.org : <http://booklooks.org/data/files/Book%20Looks%20Reports/C/A%20Court%20of%20Thorns%20and%20Roses.pdf>

Her suggestion and the suggestion that some members of the parish council have made to restrict certain books in some "adults only" age restricted section is a violation of the first amendment and inconsistent with library practices in the USA. I have not found a single example of a library restricting access like this.

Please return this book to the adult section.

2F - The Deep and Dark Blue

Please return this book to the juvenile graphic novel section.

This is another frivolous complaint by Connie Phillips. She is wasting library resources and you are just as guilty of wasting resources by placating these statements.

This book has no sexual content. Even under the more strict requirements of La. R.S. 25:225, this does not qualify as sexually explicit.

Once again Connie does not understand the differences between gender and sexual conduct. This book does have a transgender character, but does not even discuss sexual preferences of those characters.

I also find it offensive that Connie once again uses the term grooming in reference to librarians. Grooming of children and sexual assault of children is not a accusation she should be making and these baseless claims borders on libel.

Please change the rules so that we no longer need to discuss these baseless claims. At the current rate, assuming no more challenges, we will be reviewing books well into 2030 and beyond.

Please return the book to the juvenile graphic novel section and return the books under review to the shelves.

This concludes my public comment.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and please include this email in the official minutes.

Sincerely,

Kevin Marino