

**St. Tammany Parish Library
Board of Control Meeting
October 23, 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, Bill McHugh, Anthony Parr, 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. Comments must directly relate to the agenda item. In the case of a Statement of Concern (SOC) decision, the person who filed the SOC is given five minutes to speak. Board members can request a brief recess during the meeting if needed. Public comments were accepted by email (lboc@stpl.us) until 4:00 p.m. on the day of the meeting.

**1. Recognition and thanks for years of service to the Library Board of Control –
Dr. Argiro Morgan**

B. Taylor recognized Dr. Argiro Morgan for her 24 years of service to the Library Board of Control from 1999 to 2023. Dr. Morgan served as Board President from 2007 to 2016. B. Taylor stated that Dr. Morgan was a guiding force during the planning and building of the Madisonville Branch Library. B. Taylor stated that Dr. Morgan came from the academic world and brought wisdom, intellect, and common sense to the Board. Dr. Morgan spoke of her love for libraries and reading. She recounted her childhood experiences of going to the library and learning to read with relish. She stated she is thankful for what libraries have done for her and hopes she gave something back in return.

2. Approval of the minutes of the meetings of the Library Board of Control that were held on July 13, 2023, August 21, 2023, and September 28, 2023.

B. McHugh asked for a correction to the minutes from August 21, 2023 on page 16, section H. In the fifth sentence, "technical services renovation" should be changed to "technical services building."

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

Vote: B. McHugh moved to approve the three sets of minutes with the stated correction. It was seconded by A. Parr. Four were in favor, one abstained, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried.

3. NEW BUSINESS

A. Financial Reports – August and September 2023

K. LaRocca reviewed both the August and September 2023 financial reports. All expected ad valorem revenue and state revenue sharing has been received, though a little more in ad valorem is expected towards the end of the year. The budget percentage for the end of August should be 66.64%. Revenues were at 66.27% and Expenditures were at 66.64%. The budget percentage for the end of September should be 75%. Revenues were at 74.52% and Expenditures were at 75.67%. Most lines that are out of balance are due to expending those lines early or late in the year and will be in balance by the end of the year. K. LaRocca gave explanations for noteworthy lines that were over or under budget. Health Trust is over budget, but reimbursements from the reinsurance carrier are expected. Publication of Legal Notices is over budget due to longer board meeting minutes that are published in the *St. Tammany Farmer*. The Financial line is over budget due to the increased cost of the audit, which now includes testing of all statewide agreed upon procedures. The Security line is over budget due to having security at more board meetings than anticipated this year.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

Vote: A. Shaw moved to approve the August and September 2023 financial reports. It was seconded by J. Airey. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried.

B. Fall Budget Amendment

Discussion: K. LaRocca explained the differences in revenue and expenditure forecasts between the 2023 Summer Amendment and the 2023 Fall Amendment. Overall, there is an increase of \$163,762 in revenue. K. LaRocca noted that the 2023 Budget was produced in July of 2022. This

budget amendment is based on how the library ended the 2022 fiscal year and how the budget has performed over the first three quarters of 2023.

The Board was provided with the Budget Amendment and Savings spreadsheets along with the explanations. This information is also included in the board meeting packet posted on the website for the public to view. K. LaRocca reviewed adjustments to budget lines with explanations for each adjustment. The current unassigned savings is \$869,788, which keeps the library in a good position to continue working on goals identified during the strategic planning process.

The Budget Analysis shows a forecasted increase in revenue of \$160,136 due primarily to ad valorem taxes. The Fall Budget Amendment shows an increase in expenditures of \$164,225. The budget is balanced, leaving \$267 of revenue unbudgeted.

A. Parr asked when the furniture will be purchased for the Causeway, Mandeville, and Slidell branches. K. LaRocca stated that when those branches undergo renovations the furniture will be purchased. A. Parr asked about the Bookmobile conference. K. LaRocca stated that she will be meeting with the two staff members who attended the Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services conference so they can share what they learned and offer feedback.

B. McHugh complimented K. LaRocca on her ability to compile and present these types of reports. He recalled that one of the Parish Council members told him that the library's financial reports were the best he has seen from any agency that the Council oversees.

J. Airey asked for clarification about the savings figures regarding what is dedicated to mandatory expenses and future projects, as compared to what is unassigned. K. LaRocca explained the process and timeline of how the library receives ad valorem taxes. Some of the savings is dedicated for operational reserves, which are needed to run the library until the first portion of ad valorem taxes are received. Ad valorem taxes are usually received in February, but have been received as late as March 31st. K. LaRocca explained that the \$2,500,000 figure for operational reserves is calculated by taking a 5-year average of expenditures from January 1st to March 31st. J. Airey clarified that the library does not have \$5,700,000 in undedicated savings available. K. LaRocca confirmed that the savings are dedicated for specific purposes such as operational reserves, disaster and emergency funds, salaries for the last pay period of the year, invoices that the auditor will move from 2023, 4th quarter 2023 retirement, and furniture at the Slidell, Causeway, and Mandeville branches. K. LaRocca noted that the library's millage will expire on December 31, 2024. The property tax bills due this December will fund the library through 2025. If there is no funding past 2025, the only money the library will have is its Savings reserves.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

K. LaRocca read the Fall Budget Amendment resolution aloud.

Vote: A motion and a second was inadvertently skipped. B. Taylor asked for a roll call vote.

Airey: Yes Butler: Absent McHugh: Yes Parr: Yes Shaw: Yes Taylor: Yes

Motion carried.

C. Director's Report

K. LaRocca reported that the Lee Road Branch is currently being renovated. The card system that was implemented in November 2022 is still in place as staff are working to update the system adopted at the last board meeting.

Staff performed storytime at Kidz Klubhouse, St. Margaret Mary, the Community Health and Resources Fair, and the Boutique Spectacular at the Southern Hotel. Staff provided outreach services to COAST, Kiwanis Club, St. Tammany Parish School Board College and Career Fair, First Baptist Christian School, Folsom Jr. High, Madisonville Jr. High, Wooden Boat Festival, Monster Mash, Olde Towne Pumpkin Festival, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Wild Things event, and Night Out on Crime in Pearl River. Staff promoted library events on The Lake and The Highway radio stations and Fox 8 News. Staff attended the annual All Staff Training Day at the Castine Center. Managers and supervisors attended a manager's workshop. Teen Services held the SELA Youth Services Librarian Meeting at the Madisonville Branch. Kelly LaRocca presented the 2024 budget to the Parish Council Finance Committee.

The Friends of the Slidell Library held concerts at the Lacombe, South Slidell, and Slidell Branches with performances by Redwine Jazz and T'Monde. Nearly 10,000 eclipse glasses were given out to residents of the Parish for the Annular Solar Eclipse that took place on October 14th.

K. LaRocca reviewed the September 2023 and year-to-date (YTD) statistics. The YTD total circulation was 805,442, computer usage was 70,447, door count was 441,837, wireless internet inside was 80,781, and wireless internet outside was 70,247. There have been 6,848 patrons registered for library cards so far this year.

D. Board Meeting dates 2024

Discussion:

B. Geiger presented the 2024 board meeting dates for Board approval. All board meetings will take place in the Parish Council Chambers at Koop Dr. at 6:30 p.m. unless otherwise scheduled. The fourth Monday in October 2024 is not available, so the Board will need to choose another date.

Vote: B. McHugh moved to approve Wednesday, October 30, 2024 as the meeting date. It was seconded by A. Parr. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried.

Public comment: There was no public comment.

Vote: B. McHugh moved to approve the 2024 Board Meeting dates. It was seconded by A. Parr. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried.

E. Holiday Schedule 2024

Discussion:

B. Geiger presented the 2024 Holiday Schedule for Board approval. There are 15 paid holidays in accordance with the Employee Handbook and two system-wide closed days.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

Vote: A. Parr moved to approve the 2024 Holiday Schedule. It was seconded by A. Shaw. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried.

F. Rules and Regulations Update – *Section 403. Criteria for Selection*

T. DiMaggio reviewed the policy draft for *Section 403. Criteria for Selection* and noted the changes that were made due to LA R.S. 25:225. The policy states that the library will use community standards when acquiring library material that would be accessible to a minor through donation or purchase. The metrics used to determine community standards are listed in the policy. The policy states that, “Materials cataloged in the children’s (Juvenile) and teen’s (Young Adult) collections shall not contain sexually explicit material, textual, visual, or audio, produced in any medium that depicts or describes sexual conduct as defined by LA R.S. 25:225B(3) or the most recent version which is adopted herein by reference.”

Public Comment:

Roxanne Newman – Mandeville, LA. Concerned about who is going to make the determination of what is considered sexually explicit. Concerned about restricting books from the shelves. K. LaRocca explained that sexual conduct is specifically defined in LA R.S. 25:225B(3). R. Newman asked who would determine the placement of the item if the content is considered a gray area. K. LaRocca stated that the Collection Development librarian would make that determination.

Ruth Terry Sipos – Abita Springs, LA. Stated that she has faith in library staff to be attuned to the entire community.

Kevin Marino – Mandeville, LA. Stated that he has an issue with the last paragraph of the policy. Stated that the state law does not define where a book needs to live in the library and is only required to be restricted from checkout. Stated there are books for teens and young adults that contain sexual activity described in the law, but it is not porn. Stated the books need to be in the right section in the library. Asked for the Board to strike the language in the last paragraph.

Discussion:

J. Airey stated that this was discussed at the last meeting and agrees with the policy the way it is. He noted that the library is eight months ahead of the curve. A. Parr asked E. Couvillon to confirm whether or not this language follows the law. E. Couvillon confirmed that the language is actually more restrictive and goes beyond what is required by law. A. Parr asked if the card system meets the criteria required by law. E. Couvillon confirmed that the card system adopted at the last regular board meeting meets the criteria. She noted that LA R.S. 25:225 does not require physical restriction in the library. She also noted that this update is for the Collection Development policy. K. LaRocca briefly explained the difference between the library card system and the Collection Development policy.

A. Parr noted that the statute does not mention Teen or Young Adult (YA) content specifically and suggested that the Board adopt the policy without the Teen (Young Adult) portion included. J. Airey stated that the statute refers to minors and does not differentiate between teens and children. He reiterated that the library can purchase such material, but it would have to be cataloged in the Adult collection. B. McHugh stated that this was discussed at length at the last Rules and Regulations Committee Special Board meeting and the way it is written makes sense.

Vote: J. Airey moved to adopt *Section 403. Criteria for Selection* as written. It was seconded by B. McHugh. Roll call vote:

Airey: Yes Butler: Absent McHugh: Yes Parr: No Shaw: Yes Taylor: Yes

Motion carried.

G. Rules and Regulations Update – Section 407. Statements of Concern About Library Resources

K. LaRocca explained that there are two options that have been drafted for *Section 407. Statements of Concern About Library Resources* and noted the changes that were made due to LA R.S. 25:225. One option is to continue with a staff committee recommendation and an automatic Board review and decision process. The second option is to return to the previous process of a staff committee making the decision with an option for the complainant to appeal that decision to the Library Board of Control (LBOC). The exception to this is that the Board is required to make the decision if the accusation or concern is that the material contains sexual conduct as defined in LA R.S. 25:225.

T. DiMaggio noted that in accordance with LA R.S. 25:225, it is now specified in part *B. Process* that any person completing a SOC must hold a St. Tammany Parish Library card and must reside in St. Tammany Parish. K. LaRocca reviewed the updated SOC form. K. LaRocca noted that the majority of the current SOCs cite the materials as being sexually explicit, therefore the Board will likely have to review most of them.

Public Comment:

Jamie Segura – Covington, LA. Spoke highly of the eclipse glasses. Stated she is glad K. LaRocca mentioned doing background checks on staff, since so many people think that the library is run by pedophiles and pornographers. Supports the idea of staff making the decision with the option to appeal to the Board.

Lisa Rustemeyer – Covington, LA. Appreciates the efforts of the Board and staff for making policy decisions. Spoke of the library in the 1950s. Spoke of the small number of challenged titles in the 1980s. Spoke of those with an agenda and no knowledge of what is good for the library and community. Suggested requiring that the complainant speak to a librarian regarding a SOC they intend to submit.

Kevin Marino – Mandeville, LA. Supports returning to the process of a staff committee making the decision. Stated per Jeff Landry's letter, "LA R.S. 25:225 does not require a library to relocate any library materials. Whether a book is appropriate for a particular collection is controlled by the collection policy of the library. Before relocating a book to a different collection, the library should consider whether relocation is appropriate under the library's collection policy." Suggested changing the collection policy to keep YA books in the YA section.

Roxanne Newman – Mandeville, LA. Supports returning to the process of a staff committee making the decision. Applauds the inclusion of the requirement that a complainant must hold a library card and must reside in the Parish. Thanked the library for providing the eclipse glasses.

Ruth Terry Sipos – Abita Springs, LA. Thanked the Board for trying to address issues that have come up and for taking pressure off the library staff. Supports returning to the process of a staff committee making the decision. Stated there is a future out there beyond this.

Terri Lewis Stevens – Covington, LA. Spoke of the two books on the agenda. Stated that in both cases, the complainant mentions Title 14 of the criminal law regarding obscenity. Stated that the District Attorney and Jeff Landry stated that there are no books in the library that rise to the level of obscenity. Suggested rejecting SOCs that clearly do not meet Title 14 criteria.

J. Airey spoke of streamlining the comments during LBOC meetings. He spoke of the Parish Council's brief time limits on public comments for appeals on multi-million-dollar subdivisions compared to hours being spent discussing one book at the LBOC meetings. Noted that he will not be on the Board much longer and suggested deferring to E. Couvillon for advice on how to

streamline comments, while acting in accordance with LA R.S. 25:225. J. Airey stated that much like the library's budget reports that are presented to the Parish Council, the Board receives detailed reports from the review committees. He noted that the detailed reports will be helpful to the Board if any decisions are appealed. He acknowledged that most of the challenged materials will require automatic Board review due to LA R.S. 25:225, but agrees that returning to a committee decision with an option to appeal is appropriate in the long term.

A. Parr stated that returning to a process that functioned appropriately is ideal. B. McHugh responded to K. Marino's request to remove the question regarding LA R.S. 25:225 from the SOC form. B. McHugh stated that he argued to remove the question as well, but the reason it is included is because that question is on the recommended complaint form provided by the Attorney General. B. McHugh stated he is in favor of returning to a staff committee decision with the option to appeal, except for when the Board is required to review and decide in accordance with LA R.S. 25:225. He stated that librarians are professionals who know how to evaluate literature and returning to this process demonstrates support for the library staff.

The Board discussed time limits for submitting appeals under *Section C. Right to Appeal* and decided to amend the wording to include a time limit of 30 days to appeal a decision. E. Couvillon suggested the following wording change to amend Subsection C(1): "The complainant may appeal to the Library Board of Control by contacting the Assistant Director within 30 days of the mailing of the committee's decision and request to be placed on the agenda of the next available board meeting, except as provided by Subsection B(5) of this Section."

Vote: B. McHugh moved to approve the stated amendment to Subsection C(1). It was seconded by A. Parr. Roll call vote:

Airey: Yes Butler: Absent McHugh: Yes Parr: Yes Shaw: Yes Taylor: Yes

Motion carried.

J. Airey suggested that the phrase "except as provided by Subsection B(5) of this Section" could be removed from Subsection C(1) if Subsection B(5) is amended to specifically reference "Subsection C(2-5)." E. Couvillon concurred that such a change would be sufficient, as the policy still references the exception that the Board is required to review SOCs of library materials that may include sexually explicit material in accordance with LA R.S. 25:225.

Vote: J. Airey moved to amend Subsection B(5) and Subsection C(1) with the suggested changes. It was seconded by A. Shaw. Roll call vote:

Airey: Yes Butler: Absent McHugh: Yes Parr: Yes Shaw: Yes Taylor: Yes

Motion carried.

Vote: B. McHugh moved to adopt the second version of *Section 407. Statements of Concern About Library Resources* with the amended changes. This option returns the decision-making

process back to a staff committee with an option to appeal the decision to the LBOC, except for when the Board is required to review and decide on materials in accordance with LA R.S. 25:225. It was seconded by J. Airey. All were in favor, none were opposed, and one was absent. Motion carried.

H. Resolution to rescind December 13, 2022, Resolution regarding the temporary disposition of challenged materials

K. LaRocca read the resolution aloud. The resolution rescinds the December 13, 2022, resolution regarding the temporary disposition of challenged materials and directs library administration and staff to place challenged items back on the shelves with the rest of the library's collection. If adopted, the following text shall be added to *Section 407. Statements of Concern about Library Resources*: "An item that is under a Statement of Concern review shall remain classified and shelved in its current location until a decision is made concerning the item's disposition."

Public Comment:

Kim Turner – Mandeville, LA. Very happy with the Board's decisions and has been advocating for this for a year. Stated that she has never seen the main complainant attend a Board meeting. Referenced an incident of violence allegedly committed by the complainant against a library supporter. Stated that some books have saved children's lives.

Lisa Rustemeyer – Covington, LA. Spoke highly of the eclipse glasses, outreach events, and service statistics. Stated she is in favor of moving the books back to the shelves. Spoke of a few complainants having the right to control the shelving of a collection meant for all taxpayers.

Kevin Marino – Mandeville, LA. Supports the resolution. Referenced a poster that he made showing the book covers of all the challenged materials. Thanked the Board for considering the resolution. Spoke highly of the eclipse glasses. Spoke of other Parish agencies emulating the library's budget presentation and stated that librarians make everything better.

Roxanne Newman – Mandeville, LA. Supports the resolution to return the books back to the shelves. Spoke of it being National Pro Bono week and how the library hosts the "Lawyers in Libraries" program where free legal services are available to the public. Noted that there are people who want to defund the library, but they should remember that the library is a great resource that helps so many people.

Ruth Terry Sipos – Abita Springs, LA. Supports returning the books back to the shelves. Stated that the Board was trying to appease a group that is not appeasable. Stated that privacy is her greatest concern and was happy to learn that what patrons read is confidential. Stated she wants kids to feel free to browse and not be shamed for what they are reading.

Gary Lacoste – Abita Springs, LA. Asked if books with content that falls under the new law will return to their original location or where the law says they should be. Suggested that librarians review the books and move the ones that fall under the new law to the Adult section, and then Connie Phillips (the complainant) could potentially decide to rescind the challenges if she agrees with the decision. Recommended that people not attack Connie personally and stated that is why she does not come to the meetings. Spoke about an incident that occurred outside of a Parish Council meeting and said that Connie was not at fault and that the other person was to blame. Asked if the card system is going to be the determining factor as to where the books go. Stated that the law references “access to minors” and he interpreted “access” as anywhere in the library and noted that minors are 17 and under.

K. LaRocca explained that there are 70 teen items, 11 children’s items, and 47 adult items in print that have been challenged. The 47 adult books would be returned to the Adult section. Stated that she has seen 10 out of the 11 children’s books and they do not contain sexual conduct as defined by LA R.S. 25:225, therefore they would return to the Children’s section. K. LaRocca stated that she has not yet read all 70 teen (YA) items. She clarified that the card system does not state that there is no sexual material in the teen (YA) area and that YA books could potentially contain sexual conduct as defined by LA R.S. 25:225. The card system states that material in the YA collection does not contain material that has been deemed sexually explicit (as defined by LA R.S. 25:225) by the LBOC in an open public meeting. Stated that all of the items will still be reviewed by the Board so that they can determine whether or not they should be moved to the Adult section. She stated that the resolution places the books back on the YA shelves because they are YA books.

G. Lacoste asked if the books will go back to the YA shelves even if they fall under the new law. E. Couvillon clarified that the law, as interpreted by Attorney General Jeff Landry, says that “access” refers to materials being checked out. She explained that the library has a card system in place that complies with and is more restrictive than LA R.S. 25:225. E. Couvillon reiterated that “access” does not mean physical location in the library. K. LaRocca reiterated that the items will be reviewed by library staff and the majority will be reviewed by the Board as well.

Terri Lewis Stevens – Covington, LA. Stated that Attorney General Jeff Landry, now Governor, issued a series of answers to questions that helped define and clarify the law. Stated this was not the Board’s decision; this was Jeff Landry’s decision to return the books to the shelves. Stated that parents have the option to restrict their minor children. Spoke highly of the eclipse glasses. In reference to the previous commenter, stated that she has C. Phillips’ behavior on video in slow motion and can share it.

J. Airey stated that prior to LA R.S. 25:225, he would have voted no to this. Stated that Attorney General Jeff Landry, now Governor-elect, has provided guidance on the statute. Stated that it is very clear from the language in the statute, the interpretation by legal counsel, and the guidance provided by the Attorney General, that “access” of the books does not mean physical

“access” in the library. The State Legislature has directed us to do this. Stated he is in favor of the resolution.

Jamie Segura – Covington, LA. Stated that Jeff Landry’s ruling on this was politically leaning. Stated that the books will go back to the shelves, but asked the Board not to forget how this started. Stated that it began due to a group of bigoted religious zealots who decided they did not want to see a display in a library that featured LGBTQIA citizens. Stated they focused on books that contain gay, lesbian, and trans content. Spoke of the previously mentioned incident of physical violence. Stated that it did happen, it is on video, and it was done by the person who submitted the SOC’s.

Discussion:

J. Airey noted that it was the current Governor, John Bel Edwards, who signed this into law.

B. McHugh stated that he has been advocating for this since he was appointed to the Board. Stated that the resolution of December 13, 2022, was adopted during a time of great uncertainty about the legal environment that the library was in because of book challenges, false claims of pornographic materials being in the library, and threats of arrests. Stated that the resolution led to more than 150 books being banished to a restricted area, consequently stigmatizing the books and the patrons who requested them. Stated this was largely due to the actions of one single person who restricted access to books from 87,000 patrons and 200,000+ citizens of St. Tammany Parish, just by filling out a SOC. Spoke of the opinion letter that Jeff Landry issued, which answered a number of questions that arose after the adoption of Act 436, now enacted into law as LA R.S. 25:225. B. McHugh read the question and answer from number five of that letter aloud: “Does La. R.S. 25:225 require that a library restrict a minor’s access to library materials prior to check out? No.” B. McHugh stated that public opinion is overwhelmingly in favor of leaving books in their original location on the shelves while challenges are being reviewed.

Vote: B. McHugh moved to adopt the resolution to rescind the December 13, 2022, resolution regarding the temporary disposition of challenged materials. It was seconded by A. Parr.

Roll call vote:

Airey: Yes Butler: Absent McHugh: Yes Parr: Yes Shaw: Yes Taylor: Yes

Motion carried.

I. Resolution to extend time to allow for procedural due process of pending statements of concern

K. LaRocca read aloud the resolution to extend the time limit to 120 days for responding to all pending SOC’s and any SOC’s that will be received until the next meeting of the LBOC scheduled for December 11, 2023.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

Discussion: There was no discussion by the Board.

Vote: J. Airey moved to adopt the resolution to extend the time limit to 120 days to respond to pending SOCs. It was seconded by A. Parr.

Roll call vote:

Airey: Yes Butler: Absent McHugh: Yes Parr: Yes Shaw: Yes Taylor: Yes

Motion carried.

J. Statement of Concern Decision – *The Moon Within*

K. LaRocca presented the SOC for the book *The Moon Within* by Aida Salazar. 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. D.A. Warren Montgomery has instructed you to have a separate place where minors cannot go so shelve it in this section.”

Reason given: “Content violates the state obscenity statues [sic] 2021 Louisiana Laws - offensive to the average adult applying St. Tammany Parish community standards. Stop sexualization of our kids.”

K. LaRocca reviewed the book résumé which includes the publisher’s summary, number of print copies STPL owns (1), total circulation on all print copies (9), comparable library system statistics, reviews by *BookPage*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *School Library Journal*, *Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*, *Booklist*, *Shelf Awareness*, and *Publisher’s Weekly*. Also noted are awards and lists featuring this title. A total of 997 public libraries across the nation own copies of the book. The title is shelved in the Juvenile Fiction section at STPL with J Sala 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 committee found no sexual conduct in the book. The book briefly describes genitals, but not in a lewd way. The book discusses puberty, body changes, and is meant for children who are approaching or who are going through puberty. The book addresses a gender-fluid child's basic feelings about being accepted and does not go into details about being transgender. The book has literary value as a story about friendship, acceptance, and support. The book is in verse and is a good introduction to the genre.

After the committee meeting, this title was also reviewed by Library Administration in light of Act 436, now enacted into law as LA R.S. 25:225. There is no sexual conduct in this book as described by the statute. Library Administration sees no conflicts with its original location and the new law.

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

Committee Recommendation: Book should remain in the collection and is appropriate in its original location in Juvenile Fiction. The main character is not yet a teen and there is no sex in the book.

Public comment:

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

Gary Lacoste – Abita Springs, LA. Stated the book does not have sexual conduct and does not fall under the new law. Stated that he does not hate anyone. Mentioned the displays and where this all started and stated that counselors agree that it is harmful to children if they are exposed to such things. Spoke of legality vs. morality. Reiterated his earlier comment that reviewing the material and having a conversation about it with the complainant could speed up the process.

Catalina Reyna – Mandeville, LA. Stated that she was born in Mexico and came to this country after a job offer due to her experience and degrees earned in Mexico and the United Kingdom. Stated that she pays taxes like any other hardworking immigrant. Stated that libraries are for everyone. Stated that it is absurd that the SOC indicates that the book violates the law. Stated that 9 out of the 10 paragraphs copied and pasted have the wrong page numbers. Stated that restricting the book demonizes women's menstruation. Asked for the library to purchase more copies and to return the book to the shelves. Read excerpts from the book aloud.

Rachel Rhodes – Mandeville, LA. Stated the book is a beautifully written and illustrated story about coming of age, menstruation, and gender identity. Stated that all challenges have been

about LGBTQ topics, people of color, immigrants, and Jewish people. Stated it is dangerous rhetoric rooted in bigotry, hatred, and ignorance. Stated that there are 119 verses about a woman's period in the Bible. Stated there are verses about gender identity in the Torah and the Talmud. Stated that the word "homosexual" was not in the Bible until 1946. Read excerpts from a children's Bible aloud.

Lisa Rustemeyer – Covington, LA. Stated that it was a beautiful book. Stated that the story speaks to the 15,000 Hispanic and Latino residents in St. Tammany Parish. Stated it is important for girls, as puberty is beginning earlier now. Stated that the book gives a unique perspective on gender fluidity. Stated that the book fulfills the library's mission statement.

Erin Kennedy – Folsom, LA. Spoke of Connie Phillips being the sole complainant of *The Moon Within*. Spoke of the character's journey and story. Spoke of the moon ceremony that was meant to be a party to celebrate a milestone for Celi, the main character. Stated that the book allows a window to view different cultural milestones and identities. Stated that the book is appropriate for either the Juvenile or YA sections.

Terri Lewis Stevens – Covington, LA. Stated that the book is only in one branch, has been checked out nine times since 2020, and only one person has complained about the book. Stated that copies of challenged books have been stolen from library branches and suggested that cameras be installed. Stated that one of her sisters dressed like a boy while growing up. Her sister got married, had kids, and plays female sports. Stated that her sister is the definition of genderfluid and is a happy and loved adult.

Discussion:

B. Taylor stated that the book does not violate the statute. She is in favor of returning the book back to the shelves. A. Parr stated that it is a poignant coming-of-age story and celebrates Hispanic culture. B. McHugh stated that it is sad that it was only checked out nine times in three years. Stated the book provides a window into a culture not a lot of people in St. Tammany Parish are familiar with. Spoke of the theme of acceptance in the book.

Vote: A. Parr moved to affirm the committee's recommendation to return *The Moon Within* to the Juvenile Fiction section. It was seconded by B. McHugh. J. Airey stated he did not read the book, so he abstained from voting. Roll call vote:

Airey: Abstain Butler: Absent McHugh: Yes Parr: Yes Shaw: Yes Taylor: Yes

Motion carried.

J. Airey exited the meeting. The meeting continued with a quorum of four board members.

K. Statement of Concern Decision – The Freedom Writer’s Diary

K. LaRocca presented the Statement of Concern for the book *The Freedom Writer’s Diary* by Freedom Writers. 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 statutes [sic], 2021 Louisiana Laws, Revised Statutes, Title 14 - Criminal Law, Summary of Concerns: This book contains sexual activities; sexual nudity; alternate sexualities; profanity and derogatory terms;[sic]”

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 (94), comparable library system statistics, reviews by *Library Journal*. A total of 2,701 public libraries across the nation own copies of the book. The title is shelved in the Adult Non-fiction section at STPL with 305.235 Fre 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: While there are references to sexual acts and conduct, the book does not primarily consist of descriptions or depictions of sexual acts. The book is honest in its depiction and is not erotic. These scenes may be disturbing, harrowing, and shocking, but they are not gratuitous because it is always placed in a moral analysis. The scenes with sexual conduct and other violent situations are a testimony to the real events that the Freedom Writers experienced. The book’s primary audience is adults and has been shelved in the Adult Non-fiction section of the library.

After the committee meeting, this title was also reviewed by Library Administration in light of Act 436, now enacted into law as LA R.S. 25:225. Although there is sexual conduct described in the book, 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 would be able to check out this book. Library Administration sees no conflicts with its original location and the new law.

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

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

Public comment:

Connie Phillips, the patron who submitted the Statement of Concern for *The Freedom Writer's Diary*, was offered five minutes for public comment. C. Phillips was not in attendance and did not appear for public comment.

Gary Lacoste – Abita Springs, LA. Stated he was not aware that the book was already originally shelved in the Adult section.

Rachel Rhodes – Mandeville, LA. Stated that the book moved her. Spoke of her experiences of being bullied in her childhood and teen years. Stated that many children and teachers in St. Tammany Parish can relate to this book. Spoke of her experiences being a teacher and being threatened by a gang leader in the school. Stated that she reached out to the gang leader with kindness instead of violence and they became friends. Stated that the book should be shelved in the YA section.

Bonnie Schmidt – Slidell, LA. Stated that the only good thing that has come out of this issue for her is that it has exposed her to books she did not know existed and would not have selected. Stated this is a wonderful book about second chances and how teenagers are able to change their lives for the better. Stated there is no sex in the book and that she thinks the Accountability Group does not understand the difference between sex and gender.

Joan Simon – Covington, LA. Stated that she concurs with the previous speaker. Stated she likes the idea of letting a mature teen read it. Thanked the Board for the work they are doing.

Lisa Rustemeyer – Covington, LA. Recommended both the book and the movie. Spoke of materials with people of color being selected purposefully to challenge. Spoke of the complainant not reading the book. Asked to keep the book in the Adult section or consider moving it to the YA section.

Ashlie Chatagnier – Folsom, LA. Stated she was surprised to learn that the book is already in the Adult non-fiction section. Stated she was under the impression it was YA. Stated it is about teens and their real-life experiences. Stated that while some stories might be difficult, teens go through terrible things each day. Asked about the reference collection of the challenged books at Covington and Slidell. K. LaRocca confirmed that the reference collection will continue to consist of books that are currently under challenge so that anyone can review them.

Terri Lewis Stevens – Covington, LA. Commended Keith Dennis, a candidate for Parish Council, for coming to observe how this Board deliberates. Stated that this issue was created by one person who had a problem with the books and it has now become a political problem and a campaign issue. Stated that the source of the list of books are unknown and that C. Phillips did not read any of them. Spoke of the amount of time spent managing an unmanageable issue. Noted that no one has complained about this book before and it has been on the shelf since 2007.

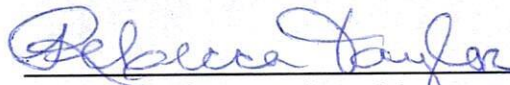
Discussion:

A. Parr spoke from a retired teacher's perspective and is in favor of returning the title back to the shelves. B. Taylor agreed and stated that it was a very enlightening book. B. McHugh stated that his review of the book is, "Wow!" He asked why anyone would want to restrict access to this book. He agreed that it should be returned to the shelves.

Vote: A. Parr moved to affirm the committee's recommendation to return *The Freedom Writer's Diary* to the Adult Non-fiction section. It was seconded by A. Shaw. Roll call vote:
Airey: Absent Butler: Absent McHugh: Yes Parr: Yes Shaw: Yes Taylor: Yes
Motion carried.

4. Adjournment

There being no further business, a motion to adjourn was made by A. Shaw and was seconded by A. Parr. All were in favor, none were opposed, and two were absent. Motion carried.



Rebecca Taylor, Board President