

**St. Tammany Parish Library
Board of Control Meeting
December 9, 2024
St. Tammany Parish Council Chambers
21490 Koop Dr.,
Mandeville, LA 70471
6:30 p.m.**

MINUTES

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

Present: Rev. Robert Belknap, Pam Georges, Carole Gillio, Jill Kesler, Tamarah Myers, Ann Shaw, Parish President Mike Cooper

Absent: None

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

A. Shaw explained the meeting rules and the rules for public comment. A three-minute time limit is established for each member of the public wishing to speak (for or against) an item on the Agenda. In the case of a Statement of Concern decision, the person who filed the Statement of Concern is given five minutes to speak.

R. Belknap led the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. Approval of the minutes of the meeting of the Library Board of Control that was held on October 30, 2024.

Public Comment:

Eileen Breslin – Folsom, LA. She asked for clarification on whether or not the minutes include a proposal to close some of the small library branches. K. LaRocca said that topic was not part of the Board's discussion at the previous meeting.

Sonnet Ireland – Slidell, LA. Regarding the previous public comment, S. Ireland clarified that the minutes reference a comment made by a member of the public regarding closing small branches. She complimented the meeting minutes, stating that they are thorough and precise. She spoke in opposition of closing small branches, stating that it is a horrible idea and should never be considered. She stated that we cannot move backward when we have such a strong library system.

C. Gillio asked for further clarification on whether or not the topic of closing small branches was in the minutes. K. LaRocca clarified that it was not discussed by the Board, but was mentioned by a member of the public during public comment.

T. Myers asked if K. LaRocca for the updated statistics for the Madisonville Branch that were discussed at the last meeting. K. LaRocca confirmed that she does have a new copy of those statistics and will give an update during the Director's Report.

Discussion: There were no suggested corrections to the minutes.

Vote: R. Belknap moved to approve the minutes of the LBOC meeting held on October 30, 2024. It was seconded by P. Georges.

Roll call vote: Belknap: Yes Cooper: Yes Georges: Yes Gillio: Yes Kesler: Yes Myers: Yes Shaw: Yes

Motion carried.

2. NEW BUSINESS

To help streamline the presentation of reports, A. Shaw asked for the Board to hold any questions until the end of each report.

A. Financial Report – October 2024

K. LaRocca reported that the library has received all of its Ad Valorem Revenue and State Revenue Sharing for the year. The budget percentage should be 80% at this point in the year. Revenues are at 94.49% and Expenditures are at 77.43%. K. LaRocca reminded the Board that Ad Valorem Revenue and State Revenue Sharing is credited in twelfths and is reflected as such on the financial report. K. LaRocca gave explanations for any lines that are over or under budget. Most of the variances are due to expenses being due early or late in the year.

The Advertising and Signage lines are under budget, but should be in balance by the end of the year. Some of the Utilities lines are under budget due to several months of nice weather. The Equipment Lease line should be expended later in the year after leasing a lift to assist in replacing parking lot lights. The Computer/Printer Supplies line is over budget due to the increased cost of toner. The Library In-Service Training line will be in balance as the expenses for the All Staff Day were paid in November. The Cameras line will be in balance by the end of the year after paying for the cameras in the Outreach building. K. LaRocca explained that the Capital Outlay-Library Resource Acquisitions lines will be expended by the end of the year as ordering is completed in November. Many of the invoices for items in the Capital Expenditures projects will be paid in November, but those lines are expected to be under 100% by the end of the year.

Public Comment:

Sonnet Ireland – Slidell, LA. She complimented the summer reading program, calling it spectacular and stated that it is astounding how much is offered for children, teens, and adults while staying within budget. She complimented the detailed financial reports. She stated that this is a fiscally responsible library and noted that library administration is very carefully taking care of our money and serves as good stewards of public funds. She asked for the Board not to take for granted the thought and effort that goes into preparing the reports.

Kevin Marino – Mandeville, LA. He complimented the financial reports, describing them as detailed and high-quality. He referenced accrual accounting and requested an explanation of the accounting process where certain expenses are incurred this year but are reflected in the financial report for the following year. K. LaRocca explained that most expenditures are paid and recorded in the financial report within the same month. Other expenditures span across two fiscal years, and the auditor applies accrual accounting to those expenses. K. LaRocca gave an example of a database with a one-year subscription that starts in one year and ends in the next, instead of January to December. The auditor makes those adjustments in March.

Discussion: There was no discussion by the Board.

Vote: P. Georges moved to approve the October 2024 financial report. It was seconded by T. Myers.

Roll call vote: Belknap: Yes Cooper: Yes Georges: Yes Gillio: Yes Kesler: Yes Myers: Yes Shaw: Yes

Motion carried.

B. Director's Report

K. LaRocca reported updates to Facilities. Subsurface drainage was installed at the Covington Branch. Three quotes were obtained for landscape improvements in front of the Covington Branch. Alternative Services turned in the lowest base quote at \$18,950. Other base quotes received were from Gardner, LLC at \$28,093 and KBarber Enterprises, LLC at \$21,425. The work should be complete by the end of December. A modular study room was installed at the Covington Branch. The Request for Quotes for the elevator at the Annex was published by the Parish Procurement Department on November 19. Quotes are due December 17.

K. LaRocca reported on Marketing and Outreach efforts. Staff provided outreach services to Covington Fall Fest, Trunk-R-Treat at Magnolia Park in Folsom, Kiwanis Terrific Kids event at Folsom Elementary, Pineview Middle School Literacy Night, Our Lady of the Lake's Festival of the Lake, Three Rivers Art Festival, St. Tammany Parish Veterans Day event, Mandeville Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Parenting Center of the St. Tammany Health System, STEM Quest Innovation Day at Pelican Park, and the Holiday of Lights. Staff promoted the library on The Lake and The Highway radio stations. Staff performed storytime at St. Timothy Preschool, Covington Head Start, A-Z Preschool, Chahta-Ima Elementary, Lacombe-Mandeville Head Start, Mayfield Elementary School, and Regina Coeli Head Start.

Staff attended the following meetings and professional development opportunities: St. Tammany Commission on Families meeting, LA Children & Youth Prevention Coalition meeting, Leadership Northshore Law Enforcement Day, and Leadership Skills Day. K. LaRocca reported on personnel additions, new contracts, and contract renewals.

The library appeared before the Parish Council Finance Committee on November 4. K. LaRocca reviewed the 2025 budget and answered questions from several Parish Council members. The meeting was recorded and is available on the Parish Government's website. The Parish will consider the library's budget as part of their overall budgetary adoption process at their December 5, 2024, Parish Council meeting. The Capital Improvement projects for an architect for the Lacombe Branch replacement and

for the Slidell Branch expansion will also be introduced at the December 5th Parish Council meeting. It will be discussed and voted on at the following Parish Council meeting in January 2025.

There are two public records request results at the District Attorney's Office for review. We have no other open public records requests in the library's possession. There are currently 115 Statements of Concern on 111 titles. The LBOC will decide on two titles at the present board meeting.

K. LaRocca reported updates to strategic planning implementation. The Accessibility Committee met in November to make final decisions about the calming room equipment and the items have been ordered. The Check Out Louisiana pilot program has been very successful. Backpacks were checked out and all State Park passes were dispersed to patrons.

K. LaRocca reported on the transition of materials review project. No graphic novels have been transferred to Graphic Novels Restricted since October 30, 2024. There were 21 Young Adult Fiction titles moved to the Adult Fiction section since October 30, 2024. To date, 1,090 Young Adult Fiction titles have been reviewed: 153 titles have been moved to the Adult Collection, and 937 titles have been moved to the Teen Collection.

K. LaRocca corrected the Madisonville statistics from September. The computer usage total was accidentally copied and pasted under door count. The correct door count for September was 3,622. K. LaRocca reviewed the October 2024 and year-to-date statistics. The total circulation for October was 78,329, computer usage was 7,101, and the door count was 53,809. There were 623 new patrons registered for library cards in October. The year-to-date total circulation was 831,189, computer usage was 70,387, and the door count was 510,148. There were 7,570 new patrons registered for library cards so far this year. K. LaRocca stated that she is hopeful that we will reach 1,000,000 in total circulation for the year.

Brent Geiger explained that library staff and board members are required to complete yearly Governmental Ethics, Sexual Harassment, and Cyber Security training. B. Geiger will send board members an email with instructions and website links to the trainings. Board members must send a copy of their training certificates and acknowledgement forms to the administration office, as the auditor requires us to keep them on file. The deadline is December 31, 2024. E. Couvillon added that any attorneys on the Board will receive one hour of CLE (Continuing Legal Education) credit for completing the Governmental Ethics training.

A. Shaw asked about the library's plan for the millage renewal campaign. K. LaRocca stated that library administration has weekly staff meetings regarding the millage election. They are reviewing the website archive of the 2007 millage election informational materials to help determine what worked, what did not work, and to gather other valuable insights from the previous campaign. The plan is to have a millage information page on the website with all of the details and FAQs in one place. The library will give out bookmarks and flyers. They are reviewing examples of successful millage campaigns from other libraries. In January, library administration will meet with staff groups to provide training and guidance on how to inform the public about the millage renewal, ensuring compliance with legal restrictions on what can be communicated by a public entity. We are allowed to educate the public and encourage them to vote, but we are not allowed to ask them to vote yes. K. LaRocca stated that she will offer training opportunities and guidance for board members as well.

C. Gillio asked if Alternative Services is the same entity that handles the janitorial services. K. LaRocca confirmed that is correct. C. Gillio asked if the company is an LLC and asked who the owner is. K. LaRocca answered that the owner is Frank Coll. C. Gillio asked where the owner resides. After brief discussion, it was confirmed that the business is located in Lacombe. A. Shaw noted that Alternative Services also handles mowing the grass at the library branches.

J. Kesler mentioned a drainage problem at the Folsom Branch. She asked if a request has been submitted to address the issue. K. LaRocca stated that she is unaware of any request or issue being reported, but she ensured that it will be addressed tomorrow morning.

A member of the public asked if they could ask a question about something in the report. E. Couvillon stated that there is no public comment period following the Director's Report, but she can email her question to K. LaRocca and she would be happy to answer. A. Shaw added that emails addressed to the LBOC are forwarded to board members and any matter requiring action receives a response.

C. Resolution to amend Statements of Concern about Library Resources Policy to shorten public speaking time

Discussion:

K. LaRocca clarified that this resolution applies solely to the speaking time allotted for public comment on an agenda item related to a Statement of Concern (SOC) review during an LBOC meeting, and not to every agenda item within the meeting. Currently, an individual who submits a SOC is allotted five minutes to speak, while other members of the public are given three minutes. It was proposed that the speaking time for both speakers be reduced to two minutes. The resolution includes a copy of the current policy, with changes noted in red.

Public Comment:

Joan Simon – Covington, LA. She opposed the resolution, stating that the library has worked hard to appease a few vocal individuals who do not represent the whole community. She stated that the group of individuals want to exclude books about marginalized groups, even though libraries should reflect all community members. She stated that the group has made false and hurtful remarks about librarians during public comment, noting that off-topic and threatening comments are rarely addressed. She mentioned that many LBOC members were selected by this group and asked which board members have library cards.

C. Gillio raised a Point of Order and stated that comments should focus on the reduced public comment period. J. Simon clarified that she is sharing her experience and opposes the reduced time limit, arguing that the Parish Council allows three minutes for public comment, which should apply here as well.

Roxanne Newman – Mandeville, LA. She stated that she is a lawyer and has two children who were raised in the community and went to public schools and libraries. She objects to the proposal to reduce the time limit. She stated that this would not allow sufficient time for the public to provide meaningful feedback, as many public commenters have taken time to read the books and offer their perspectives. She acknowledged that it would probably be fair to give equal time to both the challenger and the public commenters, but the equal time should not be reduced to two minutes.

Kevin Marino – Mandeville, LA. He stated that he opposes the resolution. He stated that it will not help save time, as the majority of the review process takes place prior to the board meetings. He stated that this unfairly penalizes the complainant, as 120 seconds is not a reasonable amount of time to explain their concern. He stated that this change would restrict public input, which goes against the spirit of open meetings laws. He asked if the resolution would go into effect retroactively for all SOC's currently submitted. He is concerned about fairness and due process, as he expected to have a reasonable opportunity to speak when he submitted his SOC's. He stated that he would be willing to rescind over 70 of his SOC's if the resolution placing graphic novels behind the circulation desk is reversed.

Sonnet Ireland – Slidell, LA. She stated that legal issues could arise from this decision, and people may feel their concerns are not being heard. She agrees that cutting one minute off of public comment will not save much time. She stated that the majority of the original complainants have not shown up to the meetings to discuss their concerns. She stated that some public comments have enlightening aspects to them and having productive discourse is a good idea. She hopes that the Board members believe in freedom of speech and are free thinkers.

Rebecca Bohm – Mandeville, LA. She opposed the resolution, citing research that shows three-minute speaking limits are standard in other states, such as Texas. She expressed concern that the Board seeks to silence viewpoints that they do not agree with. She stated that the book review process is tedious and that Board members should have been aware of this when they accepted this task. To streamline the process, she suggested invalidating the SOC if the complainant does not show up. She stated that reducing speaking time violates First Amendment rights.

Ruth Terry Sipos – Abita Springs, LA. She asked how this topic came up as a concern. She stated that the board members should have realized what they were getting into when they joined the LBOC. She estimated that reducing the time limit would only save about 10-12 minutes and emphasized that those few minutes are worth enduring for a democracy.

Kristen Luchsinger – She opposed the resolution and suggested streamlining the process by only allowing library card holders from St. Tammany Parish to submit SOC's. She asked C. Gillio whether she proposed this policy for convenience or for other reasons. C. Gillio clarified that this resolution was not her suggestion. K. Luchsinger expressed curiosity about why anyone would want to limit public comment. She pointed out the group of library supporters present and emphasized how much the library means to them.

C. Gillio noted that the school board allows two minutes for public comment during their regular meetings. She reiterated that she did not propose this resolution. K. Luchsinger apologized for the error.

Lisa Rustemeyer – Mandeville, LA. She suggested rejecting SOC decisions if the complainant does not attend the board meeting. She stated that it is a waste of time reviewing adult books when the complaint is that the book is harmful to minors. She stated that the law says that the patron must be qualified to submit a SOC, which means they must be 18 years old, must reside in St. Tammany Parish, and must have a library card. She suggested that books that have been on the shelves for 10 years and have circulated with no previous complaints should be grandfathered in or have immunity from this process.

Terri Taylor Joseph – She stated that she is opposed to the reduction of time for public comments. She stated that in order to serve the people, the Board needs to be open and willing to listen to them.

R. Belknap stated that, to his knowledge, neither this Board nor the previous Board has ever taken action to ban a book. R. Belknap stated that he does not want any of the librarians to be subject to arrest as a result of giving obscene material to a minor. He stated that he hopes the public understands that there must be concern for the librarians as well.

M. Cooper asked if there has been any concern from board members or the public who have requested to reduce the time limit. K. LaRocca explained that there was concern from board members about how to streamline the review process and a board member did specifically ask for this reduction in speaking time. M. Cooper noted that the citizens who have commented at the meeting so far have spoken for one, two, and three minutes while staying on topic. He stated the goal is to build trust in the library, as we are seeking continued funding for the library system. He stated that he does not find reasons compelling enough to reduce the public comment period. He asked for clarification that this resolution only applies to the public comment period provided for book challenges. K. LaRocca confirmed that is correct. M. Cooper noted that this Board has not yet reviewed book challenges and has not had the opportunity to determine if three minutes is too long of a comment period. K. LaRocca said the suggestion came after sharing a summary of past book review experiences with the Board.

E. Couvillon clarified that if the resolution passes, it will apply to book challenges at future board meetings, not this current meeting. E. Couvillon addressed previous public comments, clarifying that updated policies now require that book challenges can only be submitted by St. Tammany Parish residents who are 18 or older and hold a St. Tammany Parish Library card. Additionally, challenges are reviewed by a committee rather than the Board, with the Board only reviewing appeals or materials containing sexual content as defined by LA R.S. 25:225. E. Couvillon noted that these changes may reduce the number of Statements of Concern for the Board to review.

A. Shaw thanked the public for providing good and thoughtful comments.

Vote: T. Myers moved to adopt the resolution to shorten public speaking time to two minutes for public comment relating to Statements of Concern reviews. It was seconded by J. Kesler.

Roll call vote: Belknap: No Cooper: No Georges: No Gillio: Yes Kesler: Yes Myers: Yes Shaw: No

Motion failed.

D. Statement of Concern Decision – *The Hate U Give*

K. LaRocca presented the Statement of Concern (SOC) for the book *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. The statement was submitted by Lisa Rustemeyer. K. LaRocca read the statement aloud.

The recommended action by L. Rustemeyer is to: “Please move this book back to young adult. We need books like these where teens can access them freely when perusing the section for YA materials. It's won several awards and received critical praise for Thomas's writing and timely subject matter. In writing the novel, Thomas attempted to expand readers' understanding of the Black Lives Matter

movement as well as difficulties faced by black Americans who employ code switching. It was also made into a movie that received the NAACP Image Award.”

Reason given: “I only object to the placement. The book has no sexually explicit passages (even according to Book Looks!) and is excellent material relevant to teens so that they can understand issues that relate to people of color, or so they can see themselves in this story, [sic] The main character is caught between two worlds, which is stressful and complex. She must find her way through high school and the systemic racism that surrounds her, achieving her goals while making decisions that will affect her life and those she cares about. I'd like to cite another part of the Louisiana legal code: RS 25:31 ==> <https://www.legis.la.gov/legis/Law.aspx?p=y&d=84402>”

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 (182), number of audiobooks on CD (2), total circulation on all audiobooks on CD (28), number of E-audiobook digital resources available (1), and total circulation on digital E-audiobooks (0). The movie has circulated 214 times. K. LaRocca reviewed comparable library system statistics, reviews by *Publishers Weekly*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *Booklist*, *School Library Journal*, *Voice of Youth Advocates*, *BookPage*, *Horn Book Magazine*, and *Shelf Awareness*. Also noted are awards and lists featuring this title. The publisher’s recommended age group is 14 and up. The book is shelved in Young Adult (YA) Fiction in surrounding library systems. It was previously shelved in the YA Fiction section at STPL, but has been moved to Adult Fiction with NA Thom 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.

Summary of the committee report: The book was moved to the Adult Fiction collection because of content on page 81 that the committee interpreted to meet the criteria defined in LA R.S. 25:225. A Restricted or Semi-restricted library card cannot check out a book from the Adult collection. The book was not moved because of the subject matter or themes of the book. The committee did not find that the current book placement violates LA R.S. 25:31, as we are allowing parents to decide what their children can check out.

Options for the Board: Keep the book in Adult Fiction, move the book back to Teen Fiction, restrict the book behind the desk, or remove it from the library.

Committee Recommendation: Based on the directives of the Board regarding the evaluation, placement, and disposition of all YA materials, the committee believes this title should remain in the Adult collection. Teens whose parents have chosen to give them access to the Adult collection will be able to check out the book.

Discussion:

C. Gillio asked K. LaRocca to explain the Teen and New Adult sections. K. LaRocca explained that after the Board adopted a policy stating that the YA collection would not include sexual conduct as defined by LA R.S. 25:225, they instructed the library to review the entire YA collection for sexual content. Conversely, the policy states that the Adult collection may contain sexual conduct as defined by LA R.S. 25:225. In order to follow policy and the directives of the Board, we are phasing out the YA collection to create a Teen collection and New Adult collection. The New Adult collection is part of the Adult collection. Items not containing sexual conduct will be moved to the Teen collection and items with

sexual conduct will be moved to the New Adult collection. K. LaRocca noted that it is possible the library may err too far on the side of caution regarding the placement of certain books, which is the issue raised in this particular SOC. C. Gillio clarified that K. LaRocca is referring to the previous Board when speaking of the policies and directives. K. LaRocca confirmed that is correct and explained that those are the policies that are in place at this time.

R. Belknap asked for clarification on the intended age ranges for the Children's, Teen, and New Adult collections. K. LaRocca stated that the Children's age range is 0-11, Teen age range is 12-17, and New Adult is part of the Adult collection and is meant for ages 18 and up.

Public Comment:

Lisa Rustemeyer was the individual who submitted the SOC. She stated that she was moved by the book, as it is an intense story and is authentic. She noted that the movie based on the book is rated PG-13. She stated the book gives insight into underserved neighborhoods. She stated the book is written for and about teens. She gave a brief summary of the book, describing how the main character, Starr Carter, navigates two worlds - a mostly poor, black neighborhood and an affluent, predominantly white private school. She stated that the book was on the New York Times Young Adult best seller list for 50 weeks and has won numerous awards. She stated that the author lives in Jackson, MS. She stated that parents have the tools to oversee their children's selections because of the tiered library card system. She noted that the legislation requiring a tiered card system was modeled after the card system that St. Tammany Parish Library already had in place. The Attorney General at that time, Jeff Landry, provided a guide for libraries and clarified that the law does not require the library to relocate any materials. She stated that she understands the abundance of caution that the librarians have for the books they review, but she feels that the book should be returned to the YA collection. She stated that the book does not contain explicit sex as defined in the law and that the passage on page 81 only mentions hands and hips. The passage is a helpful example of setting boundaries that are useful in teen's lives.

Rachel Rhodes – Mandeville, LA. She stated that the tiered library card system empowers parents to decide what materials they will allow their children to borrow. She stated that *The Hate U Give* is an essential book that tackles the uncomfortable but crucial realities of racial inequality from the perspective of a black teen girl. She said the book encourages critical discussions on systemic racism and fosters empathy. She spoke about troubling stories in the Bible, but would not want it removed from the library or restricted behind the circulation desk. She stated that it is crucial to evaluate a book in its entirety.

Diane Casteel – She read aloud a statement from Angie Thomas, author of *The Hate U Give*. She noted that the book is suggested for ages 14 and up and grade 8 and up. She stated that children need access to information on topics that interest them and noted that young black youth are oftentimes short on resources. The ability to browse the shelves for books is important, as it allows people to discover titles they might not have come across otherwise.

Roxanne Newman – Mandeville, LA. She spoke of the term book banning and clarified that it can take many forms besides removing books from the library. It also includes moving books behind the circulation desk and moving books to a more restricted section. She stated that there are no obscene materials in the library. She said the book is very moving and engaging, and she did not find anything objectionable that should warrant its removal from the Teen section. She stated that placing the book in

the Adult section is a form of censorship called red flagging and she supports moving the book back to the Teen section.

Kevin Marino – Mandeville, LA. He strongly supports moving the book back to the teen section. He agreed with R. Newman's comment that there are no obscene materials in the library. He stated that the Board has banned books by moving them behind the circulation desk and by moving them from their appropriate collection. He stated that the book offers crucial insights on race, identity, and social justice, emphasizing that teens reading about diverse characters fosters empathy and understanding. He noted that the library's policies are more restrictive than what is required by law and it infringes upon First Amendment rights by unnecessarily restricting access to information.

Sonnet Ireland – Slidell, LA. She stated that *The Hate U Give* was one of the top 10 most challenged books from 2017 to 2021. She stated that the sexual content in the book is not really sexual, and the law is very vague. She suspects that the staff are not sure what to do because of threats from the public and community leaders, resulting in unintentional self-censoring. She stated that almost a quarter of our population is not white and wondered what it must be like to be the only kid of a minority race at school. She stated that youth of all races should be able to read this book. She noted that some of the complaints were about the language used in the book and stated that it is unlikely that teens have not heard the "F" word and the "N" word. She spoke of high teen pregnancy rates and low literacy rates.

Rebecca Bohm – She stated that the book is moving, powerful, and addresses race relations and difficulties faced by black Americans. She stated that the book can help black teens understand issues that affect them and can teach white teens to be empathetic to these issues. She stated that the book is a learning tool to educate people about racial injustice. She noted that her daughter read this book in the gifted program in high school. She stated that there is no reason to move the book to the Adult section. She understands why library staff felt it was necessary to move the book, as they have been bullied, harassed, and threatened by members of our community.

Kristen Luchsinger – She stated that the book should be in the Young Adult section. The book is about injustice, identity, and finding one's voice amidst adversity. She explained that shielding young adults from these issues does not protect them; it isolates them from the tools they need to navigate an imperfect world. She stated the book is honest and fosters understanding, compassion, and critical thinking. She stated that books like this spark conversations and bridge cultural divides.

Robin Schulberg – Covington, LA. She stated that she is a member of the executive committee of the Greater Covington National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She asked for the book to be returned to the Teen section. She explained that she was under the impression that Connie Phillips challenged the book due to inflammatory racial commentary. K. LaRocca explained that C. Phillips' SOC was rescinded and not reviewed by the Board. R. Schulberg stated that both the book and the movie were wonderful. She spoke about black kids having to navigate two different worlds. She spoke about the trauma that Starr, the main character, experienced when her childhood friend was killed by a police officer and the actions that followed.

Ruth Terry Sipos – Abita Springs, LA. She supports returning the book to the Teen section. She stated that teens go to the library to browse, therefore removing the book from the Teen section restricts it from its intended readers. She noted that 182 people checked out the book and she does not think it was because of the content on page 81.

Keith McFarland – Lacombe, LA. He stated that he is a substitute high school teacher in St. Tammany. He explained that he does not want any books banned, but thinks that some should be censored. He stated that banning books could hinder creativity, as it may discourage someone from writing a book about their story because of potential negative reactions from people due to the content. He stated that his story is his story no matter how graphic it is. He stated that writing is an artform and that he can identify with the book *The Hate U Give*. He stated that some books should be censored because the subject matter is not age appropriate due to graphic content or profanity. He pointed out that movies have age ratings, music, cigarettes, and alcohol have warning labels, and medications come with child-proof caps. He stated that these items are censored but not banned.

Terri Taylor Joseph – Covington, LA. She stated that she is speaking as a black woman, a resident, a voter, a library cardholder, a mother of black children, a wife of a black man, a daughter of a black man, and a sister to two black men. She stated that they are not a monolith, but have a shared experience of racism and systemic institutionalized oppression. She shared an example of when her brother and his black friends were stopped on Elysian Fields Ave. by police with guns drawn. She noted that none of the boys were drunk or drinking. One of her brother's friends was sleeping in the back of the van after having football practice all day and did not hear the commotion. The police opened the van door and placed a gun to his head. She emphasized that he could have been killed. She stated that the excuse given to her brother was that there had been a theft in the area with a description of his vehicle, which was a 1988 Astro van. One of her brother's friends was driving a separate group of friends down the same street and was also stopped. He was given the same excuse, even though his vehicle was a Datsun 210. She stated that she would have allowed her daughters to read *The Hate U Give* when they were young teens. She stated that hearing these stories makes us kinder and develops empathy in young adults.

Melanie Todd – Covington, LA. She stated that she is an English teacher at a private high school in Covington. Her husband is white and is a professor at Xavier University, a historically black college in New Orleans. She and her husband are devoted to literature and to supporting communities of color, using their power and privilege to help in any way they can. She stated that she is a fierce defender of the library and applauds the librarians for their efforts. She stated that her son is a privileged, white, middle class child who does not have to rely on the library in the same way as other kids in the community. Students in her class are currently reading *The Hate U Give*, which they chose to read independently. Students who cannot afford to buy the book rely on libraries. She stated that books should provide mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. Windows allow a brief look into someone else's world to understand their experience and mirrors provide a way for kids to see themselves in these stories. She asked for the book to be placed in the Teen section.

There was one public comment from an individual who did not wish to speak. They were in favor of the book remaining where library staff originally placed it.

A. Shaw asked why staff chose to put the book in the Adult section. K. LaRocca read the passage on page 81 aloud. She explained that the committee interpreted the description in the passage as "actual simulated or animated touching, caressing, or fondling" of body parts, as described in LA R.S. 25:225(c). K. LaRocca stated that library staff are always going to err on the side of caution with their recommendations. The book is under review by the Board to help decide how to proceed with the placement of the book if they do not agree with the committee's recommendation.

R. Belknap stated that he found the book to be a challenge. He stated that hatred is not just along racial lines. He shared that he came to the United States from Germany as a teen and his classmates called him a Nazi and many other derogatory terms. He stated that some people do not realize just how cruel children can be, and we need to teach them to stop being cruel to each other. He stated that he appreciates the Boy Scouts of America, as that was the one place he felt comfortable and was able to share some of the problems he was experiencing. He stated that we do need books that help us find comfort and to realize that we are not alone. He acknowledged that the totality of the book should be considered, not just specific passages.

C. Gillio stated that she was troubled by the book. She stated that she does not feel that the sexual conduct depicted on page 81 is enough to restrict the book for that reason alone. She stated that if she was a black person she would be offended by the book. She said that the author sends an underlying message that thug life is the norm, but that is not the message one should want to give to young black people or anyone else. She said they should be encouraged to rise above, like President Obama and many other black professionals. She stated that the author refers to pregnant girls in high school, and implies that this is the norm. She stated that the author praises Tupac, referring to him as a thug and a gangster, and praises her agent as the biggest doer. She agreed that the book inspires empathy, but is disappointed and stated that the author could have done a lot better with it. She stated that while some books appear to defend the minority community and portray them as downtrodden, they in fact seem to be impliedly geared at keeping these people that way. She stated that we do not want young people to read this and think that this is cool. She read a passage aloud and said that it sends a message of violence against women. She told the public that she has listened to their feedback and asked them to understand that some of the books they consider empathetic carry an underlying tone that sends the wrong message to young people.

C. Gillio asked about censorship policies and the possibility of placing a warning label on the books, instead of moving books to other sections. K. LaRocca explained that the card system currently works on the specific collections and placing a label on the item would not prevent checkout. E. Couvillon added that there has been discussion by the prior Board of labeling certain books rather than moving them. She explained that if the Board is not voting on the basis of sexual content, then the book would not necessarily fall under the same restrictions that apply to material containing sexual content and where they are shelved in the library. E. Couvillon explained that the Board could make a motion contingent upon the future implementation of that process or can postpone the vote on this Statement of Concern in order to implement a policy and procedure.

Vote: C. Gillio moved to postpone the vote in order to implement a policy and procedure for utilizing warning labels for certain materials. It was seconded by R. Belknap.

There was inaudible public comment from the audience. E. Couvillon explained that if this vote is postponed, there will be an opportunity for more public comment when the book is placed on the agenda for a future meeting.

Roll call vote: Belknap: Yes Cooper: Yes Georges: No Gillio: Yes Kesler: No Myers: No Shaw: No

Motion to postpone failed.

P. Georges moved to return *The Hate U Give* back to the Teen fiction collection. It was seconded by M. Cooper.

Roll call vote: Belknap: No Cooper: Yes Georges: Yes Gillio: No Kesler: No Myers: No Shaw: No
Motion to return the book to the Teen Fiction collection failed.

J. Kesler moved to affirm the committee's recommendation for *The Hate U Give* to remain in the Adult collection. It was seconded by T. Myers. T. Myers clarified that she does not think that anyone is recommending removing the book from the library. She explained that children need guidance in their exposure to stories like this and it should be a parent's prerogative whether or not their child can access such materials.

Roll call vote: Belknap: Yes Cooper: Yes Georges: Yes Gillio: Yes Kesler: Yes Myers: Yes Shaw: Yes
Motion carried.

E. Statement of Concern Decision - *Triangles*

K. LaRocca presented the Statements of Concern for the book *Triangles* by Ellen Hopkins. The statements were submitted by Rosalind Murr and Sabrina Scott. K. LaRocca noted that both statements were submitted in November 2022, prior to the requirement that the complainant must be a St. Tammany Parish resident. The committee reviewed both statements, even though one of the complainants lives in Youngsville, LA. K. LaRocca read the statement from R. Murr aloud.

The recommended action by R. Murr is: "Remove it from any children's sections, ask for ID to check out and not allowable for a minor to download."

Reason given: "This is breaking child"

K. LaRocca read the statement from S. Scott aloud.

The recommended action by S. Scott is: "Restrict access to minors via age verification. Book should be placed in an age restricted section of the library in order to protect children from graphic content while browsing. Ellen Hopkins books should be removed from the STPL system. We should not be funding these types of books. Adults can purchase privately if desired."

Reason given: "Strong sexual content involving minors, derogatory [sic] racial slurs, dysfunctional sexual behaviors involving manipulation, mind games, may trigger or entice adolescents with low self esteem, underage sexual discussion, externalizing self value through promiscuous sexual behavior. Alcohol and drug abuse and risky behavior associated with it. Grossly demeaning [sic] sexual behavior, as well as drug and alcohol abuse that add no value to society."

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 (75), comparable library system statistics, reviews by *Library Journal*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *Booklist*. A total of 958 public libraries across the nation own copies of the book. The title is shelved in the Adult Fiction collection with Fic Hopk 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.

The complainant, R. Murr, suggested removing the book from the children's section, but the committee noted that the book is currently and always has been shelved in the Adult Fiction collection. The main characters are adult women in their thirties with families and the subject matter is not appealing to children and teens. In compliance with LA R.S. 25:225, the library card system does not allow any minor with a Restricted or Semi-restricted card to check out the book in the library. The title does not show up in any search utilizing the Kids Catalog.

Since the complainant, R. Scott, cites the Louisiana Criminal Law Revised Statute 14:91.11, the book was evaluated based on the criteria set forth in the statute. The committee did not find a violation of the statute. R. Scott also cites LA R.S. 17:100.7 concerning internet access in public schools, which has no bearing on this Statement of Concern. R. Scott also cites LA R.S. 14:81.1 concerning pornography involving juveniles. The committee did not find any pornography involving juveniles.

Summary of Committee Report: The committee did not find the material to be inappropriate to the average adult applying contemporary community standards with respect to what is suitable for minors and the book was not written for minors. While Hopkins is noted for writing fiction for teens, this particular book is intended for adults.

Options for the Board: The Board could choose to keep the book in the Adult Fiction section, restrict the book behind the circulation desk, or remove the book from the collection.

Committee Recommendation: The book should remain in Adult Fiction where it is restricted to minors by parental or guardian choice with our card system.

Public Comment:

Rosalind Murr and Sabrina Scott, the individuals who submitted the Statements of Concern for *Triangles*, were offered five minutes for public comment. Neither individual was in attendance and neither appeared for public comment.

Kevin Marino – Mandeville, LA. He stated that a non-resident of St. Tammany asked for the book to be removed from the library, which is clearly an act of banning. He referenced Supreme Court case *Sund v. Wichita Falls* that talks about unconstitutional stigmas that result from moving books to incorrect locations. He stated that S. Scott suggested that adults can purchase the book for themselves, but K. Marino noted over 11% of St. Tammany Parish residents live in poverty. He referenced the Supreme Court case *Miller v. California* which resulted in establishing the Miller Test that helps determine if content is obscene. He agreed that obscene books should not be in the library and asserted that there are no obscene or pornographic materials in the library.

Sonnet Ireland – Slidell, LA. She asked if we are going to tear apart other books such as James Patterson's novels, which are both sexual and violent. She stated that there are many books that are very sexual and recommended just not reading them if one does not like that type of book. She spoke of the tiered card system and said that parents should be in charge of their own kids. She emphasized that it is an adult book that is being challenged and suggested that the library not review adult books. She

noted that libraries do not rate movies; instead, a government entity is responsible for that. She added that books far outnumber movies.

Jean Wiggan – Abita Springs, LA. She stated that the people who submitted the SOC's are taking away the rights of the professional librarians, whom she trusts. She stated that those who wish to make decisions about books should go to library school. She stated that she does not want anyone in this Parish telling her what she can read.

Rebecca Bohm – She stated that the SOC's for *Triangles* should be dismissed and noted that one of the complainants does not live in St. Tammany Parish. She emphasized that the book is appropriately shelved in the Adult section. She stated that the book addresses issues that affect women in life, such as addiction and sexual assault. She referenced an earlier comment that referred to the black community as "these people" and felt that it was a racist remark. She recommended two books, *White Fragility* and *So You Want to Talk About Race*, to educate them.

Kristen Luchsinger – She stated that the book is an adult book located in the Adult Fiction section and the complainants are not present to defend their challenge.

Barbara Mamoulides – Mandeville, LA. She stated that this is an adult book located in the Adult Fiction section. She acknowledged that this book and many others may not be everyone's cup of tea. She stated that the complainants comment that she "heard" that the book has problematic issues is a red flag that she may be looking for problems.

Ruth Terry Sipos – She shared a story about listening to an audiobook on a CD player years ago. A man asked her what she was listening to and where she buys her audiobooks. She told him she gets them from her library and that is why she pays taxes. She stated that this book is already in the Adult section. She appreciates that the library has books of various genres, even ones that she does not read.

Jamie Segura – Covington, LA. She noted that the book has been on the shelf since 2017 without any challenges, but now it has suddenly become a problem. She stated that the book is in the Adult section and the Board should not tell her what she can and cannot read. She asked how many members of the library board have library cards. C. Gillio stated that she does have a library card and utilizes the library.

Lisa Rustemeyer – She stated that she did not read the book, but noted that it has always been in the Adult section. She spoke about streamlining the process by not spending time reviewing SOC's on adult books submitted by individuals who do not show up to defend their challenge and who are not residents of St. Tammany Parish. She stated that parents have rights and responsibilities to parent their children in public spaces. She stated that adults should be able to freely read what they wish in a public library.

Terri Taylor Joseph – She stated that her parents were married for nearly 55 years before her mother passed away. She stated that she has never lived in the hood, has a master's degree, and thinks for herself. She stated that she has not read this book, but has an open mind. She reiterated that the book is in the Adult section. She stated that it would be offensive for the Board to ban this book, but it's even more offensive for someone to tell her how she should think or what she should be offended by. She stated for the record that she is not offended by any of the books that were discussed at the meeting.

There was one public comment from an individual who did not wish to speak. They were in favor of the book remaining where library staff originally placed it.

Vote:

T. Myers moved to affirm the committee's recommendation for *Triangles* to remain in the Adult Fiction collection. It was seconded by P. Georges.

Roll call vote: Belknap: Yes Cooper: Yes Georges: Yes Gillio: Yes Kesler: Yes Myers: Yes Shaw: Yes

Motion carried.

3. Adjournment

There being no further business, a motion to adjourn was made by M. Cooper and was seconded by P. Georges. All were in favor, none were opposed, and none were absent. Motion carried.


Pam Georges, Secretary/Treasurer