February 24, 2022

The Iowa City Public Library Board of Trustees Supports Intellectual Freedom in Schools and Libraries

Over the past few years, challenges to the content that "should be available" at libraries in Iowa and across the nation have come under great and increasing scrutiny.

In our capacity as the Iowa City Public Library (ICPL) Board of Trustees, we believe in Intellectual Freedom, a core value of ICPL and of the American Library Association. We believe that all Americans have an inalienable right to seek information, read, and speak freely; as is protected by our First Amendment.

We not only believe that not only all Americans have the right of this pursuit, but that facilitating this pursuit of knowledge is a core objective of libraries everywhere. Libraries are unique democratic ideas, spaces where open discourse is welcome, and where varied points of view are valued.

Libraries strive to offer wide perspectives, so that any member of our democracy can examine ideas that act as mirrors, reflecting ourselves; as windows, looking into ideas unlike our own; or as sliding glass doors, where we can grow from our own perspective to a broader community or idea (Bishop, 1990).[1] Intellectual Freedom protects our ability to explore our world and to think critically about the information we find there.

Bills proposed during this legislative session would fundamentally change libraries as we know them, limiting libraries as institutions that guarantee free speech. Specifically, HF2321, empowers City Councils to overrule a library board in terms of placement of an item within a library collection as well as limiting an item to patrons above a certain age.

Bills considered "parent's rights" protections are passing quickly through subcommittees. Legislation proposing harsh penalties for librarians, teachers and administrators (SF2198 and HF2176) chills Iowa's ability to hire quality educators and free speech advocates. HSB705 removes language that requires schools to hire one certified librarian per school district, allowing districts to hire personnel that have no training or experience in selecting appropriate

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[1] Bishop, R.S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives*, 6(3), ix-xi.

materials for students. These bills claim "transparency," but transparency already exists for every library in the state.

The ICPL Board recognizes the diligent work that certified librarians perform to curate books and materials, maintaining a collection that is current, fitting the needs, interests, experiences, abilities and values of everyone in their communities. Librarians select and review materials carefully to best support their own diverse communities. Selection policies at each Iowa library are public information, open to public commentary. All libraries in Iowa, school or public, include searchable digital catalogs, where citizens can openly view all library materials.

We encourage parents and guardians to participate in their child's learning, to read and discuss what ideas and perspectives their children encounter. Parents and guardians have every right to instill their own values and encourage appropriate exploration of new ideas in their children. We believe that each parent or guardian has this ability, but that this right cannot limit other parents or guardians' rights to do the same with *their* children.

Our Liberties and Rights as Iowans and Americans are under scrutiny as communities closely examine their values in the current national climate. By proxy, the Libraries in our communities are under a mirrored scrutiny. With this said, The Iowa City Public Library Board of Trustees resoundingly supports our state libraries as a professional community which strives to provide the highest quality and equitable service possible to their patrons across Iowa.

Adopted and approved by the Iowa City Public Library Board of Trustees on February 24, 2022.