

**NATIONAL
COALITION
AGAINST
CENSORSHIP** **KIDS'
RIGHT
TO READ**

September 22, 2022

Interim Superintendent
Spotsylvania County Public Schools
8020 River Stone Drive
Fredericksburg, VA 22407

Dear Mr. Kelly S Guempel,

cc: Board of Trustees

The National Coalition Against Censorship is an alliance of national nonprofit groups dedicated to protecting freedom of expression, including the rights of K-12 students, teachers, and staff. We are writing in regards to reports that four library books have been improperly removed from Spotsylvania school libraries. We urge you to return the books to library shelves pending a formal review.

As we understand it, a local parent challenged thirteen district library books. Board Policy IIA*-R explicitly states that book challenges must be reviewed by an "ad hoc school review committee" applying the designated criteria. However, we have been informed that four of those books were removed by district personnel without following this policy.

The decision to ignore established policy was improper and contrary to the best interests of Spotsylvania County Public Schools and its students. Board Policy IIA*-R helps ensure that book challenge decisions are made based on objective criteria which prioritize the needs of students.

In addition, ignoring written policy sets a dangerous precedent for the district. It allows complainants to ignore the formal reconsideration process and go directly to staff members to have instructional material removed. That is problematic since it permits an individual to impose their views on the school community. Therefore, we urge you to return any improperly removed books to school libraries and to conduct a formal review in accordance with district policies.

We understand that challenges to educational materials are often emotionally charged. As a result, it is important that districts adjudicate challenges in a manner which ensures that all parties feel that their views have been considered and that decisions about educational material are made in an objective, nonpolitical manner. Therefore, we encourage you to consider amending your policies as suggested in the attached guidelines, which includes sample book challenge procedures from school districts across the country.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Finan". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

Co-signed by: American Booksellers for Free Expression
The Authors Guild
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
PEN America

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