

NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP

July 13, 2023

Board of Trustees
Rockwell Falls Public Library
19 Main Street
Lake Luzerne, NY 12846

*Sent via email to kmrflibrary@gmail.com, jsilburn.rfpl@gmail.com,
joshjacquard.rfpl@gmail.com, joneskat73@gmail.com*

Dear Members of the Board,

As a nonpartisan organization dedicated to freedom of speech, thought, and the right to read, the National Coalition Against Censorship is alarmed by the Rockwell Falls Public Library's postponement and subsequent cancellation of the April 15 Drag Queen Story Hour, as well as recent suggestions from members of your cohort that the Library should remove any books that encompass LGBTQ+ themes or topics that purportedly relate to Critical Race Theory. Public libraries are government-run institutions, and so are prohibited from restricting access to materials based on viewpoints that are expressed in them. We urge you to uphold this principle of viewpoint neutrality, and to support your staff in its programming and acquisition decisions.

It is our understanding that there was controversy in the community, expressed at a Library Board meeting following the public announcement of the Drag Queen Story Hour to take place at Rockwell Falls Public Library. The Board responded to community members opposing the event, by deciding to "postpone" it so as to conduct "additional research" into the performer and the planned reading. To date, the results of any such research have not materialized, and the event no longer appears slated for rescheduling.

The de facto cancellation of the event in the face of viewpoint-based opposition raises serious First Amendment concerns. These concerns are aggravated by recent calls, coming from a member of the Board, to remove books containing LGBTQ characters or issues, or books exploring themes of racial diversity or marginalized histories from the library collection.

Such censorship, aside from the First Amendment concerns it raises, also violates the fundamental purpose of a library. Books and programming representing a wide variety of voices allow patrons of all ages and all backgrounds to find connection and context for experiences they are already

NCAC PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Actors' Equity Association
AICA-USA
American Association of
School Administrators
American Association of
University Professors
American Association of
University Women
American Booksellers for
Free Expression
American Civil Liberties Union
American Ethical Union
American Federation of Teachers
American Jewish Committee
American Library Association
American Literary Translators
Association
American Society of Journalists
& Authors
Americans United for Separation of
Church & State
Association of American Publishers
Authors Guild
Catholics for Choice
Children's Literature Association
College Art Association
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
The Creative Coalition
Directors Guild of America
Dramatists Guild of America
Dramatists Legal Defense Fund
Educational Book & Media Association
First Amendment Lawyers Association
Free Speech Coalition
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health
and Social Justice
International Association of Art Critics
United States (AICA-USA)
International Literacy Association
Lambda Legal
Modern Language Association
National Center for Science Education
National Communication Association
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Teachers of
English
National Education Association
National Youth Rights Association
The News Guild-CWA
PEN America
People for the American Way
PFLAG National
Planned Parenthood Federation of
America
Poets & Writers
Project Censored
SAG-AFTRA
Sexuality Information & Education
Council of the U.S.
Society of Children's Book Writers
& Illustrators
Student Press Law Center
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ,
Office of Communication
United Methodist Church,
United Methodist Communications
Women's American ORT
Woodhull Freedom Foundation
Writers Guild of America, East
Writers Guild of America, West

having, to safely explore unfamiliar ideas, and broaden their understanding of the world. When a public library has a policy of inviting people to read to children, it cannot exclude specific readers because public servants or patrons dislike their message.

Some board trustees and community members may disagree with the contents of certain events or books based on their own political or religious beliefs. They are entitled to avoid such materials, and to prevent their own children from seeing them. But they cannot prevent others from doing so. Libraries exist to serve every individual in the community, and therefore cannot accede to demands by any group of parents to censor the library's holdings in order to conform with their political or religious beliefs.

We urge each of you to uphold your responsibility to serve every member of your community, including those who have views with which you disagree.

Signed:

National Coalition Against Censorship

The Authors Guild

American Library Association

Children's and Young Adult Books Committee, PEN America

cc: Courtney Keir, Library Director, Rockwell Falls Public Library