

**NATIONAL
COALITION
AGAINST
CENSORSHIP**

**KIDS'
RIGHT
TO READ**

September 21, 2023

Library Board of Control
St. Tammany Parish Library
1112 W. 21st Ave
Covington, LA 70433

Dear Board Members,

The National Coalition Against Censorship is an alliance of nonprofit groups dedicated to protecting freedom of expression. We write to you today out of concern that your library's current policies on book challenges encourage meritless, politicized challenges to valuable materials and result in harmful limitation of access to library books. We recommend specific improvements to the library's challenge policies in order to create a better and fairer process for reviewing book challenges, and to reduce the unnecessary censorship of material caused by the current backlog of challenges.

As we understand it, over the past year the St. Tammany Parish Library received over 150 challenges to library books and has restricted access to every one of those books while challenges are reviewed. This makes the default outcome of any book challenge – no matter how meritless – an immediate restriction to the challenged materials for all students. This is clearly the wrong default as a matter of pure due process and fairness - and worse, clearly encourages the filing of meritless challenges in the hope that a book will be at least temporarily restricted while under review.

We are particularly concerned because your website says that the library has only reviewed a small fraction of the challenged books,¹ which suggests that reviewing the entire list – just from the past year! – may take years. The website also indicates that almost all of the small number of challenges that have been adjudicated thus far have been rejected.² Hence, your own records demonstrate that under your current policy, access to valuable learning materials has been - and will continue to be - restricted for no good reason. We strongly urge you to flip this default and continue to provide access to books undergoing a challenge review. The alternative, as your patrons are currently experiencing, encourages a deprivation of knowledge by those who seek to impede access to ideas they do not like.

Similarly, segregating books during the review process is problematic because such restrictions also encourage meritless challenges in the hope that any challenge will result in reduced access to library materials, for at least some period of time.

¹ "Materials under Review." *St. Tammany Parish Library*

www.sttammanylibrary.org/library-policies/challenged-materials-policy/materials-under-review/.

² Ibid.

Segregation can serve as a library's scarlet letter – it influences how readers read and understand texts and can stigmatize the viewpoints and ideas expressed by those books. Segregation can discourage readers from discovering books that they might find stimulating or educational and may have a chilling effect on librarians who are likely to avoid purchasing books that could be challenged.

For all of the above reasons, many library policies include an explicit requirement that access to books remain unrestricted during the reconsideration process. We encourage you to adopt similar policies. By doing so, you can ensure that St. Tammany Parish Library is fulfilling its stated goal of providing "a collection that supports the broad range of interests and diverse backgrounds of the citizens of St. Tammany Parish,"³ rather than catering to the political views of a vocal minority.

Thank you for your time and attention to this letter. Please let us know if we can be of any further assistance in this matter; my contact information at NCAC is listed below.

Sincerely,



Lee Rowland
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship
Lee@ncac.org

Co-signed by: American Booksellers for Free Expression
The Authors Guild
Children's and Young Adult Books Committee, PEN America
Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

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³ "Statements of Concern about Library Resources Policy." *St. Tammany Parish Library*
www.sttammanylibrary.org/library-policies/challenged-materials-policy/.