

April 8, 2022

AnyPlace County for Freedoms
c/o Ms. Jane Smith
1400 N 15th Street
AnyTown, AnyPlace 99875

Dear AnyPlace County for Freedoms,

Thank you for your recent submission of the *Reconsideration of Library Material Form* regarding your concern for the graphic novel *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe. The reconsideration committee has reviewed the material in question, as well as your organization's concerns and recommendations. The Library Board of Trustees has established a materials selection policy for choosing resources, as well as a detailed reconsideration procedure for requesting reevaluation of items. I have enclosed both those policies and procedures for your review.

First and foremost, I would like to correct an incorrect statement made on the *Chalkboard Review* website regarding the graphic novel. Whereas, the website states, "several sexual scenes in which a child gives oral sex to an older man" is false. At no point in the graphic novel are there experiences of rape or child molestation. Additionally, the website describes the book as "child pornography" which is also false as all sexual encounters in the novel are between consenting adults.

Additionally, for anyone who would deem the graphics depicted in the novel as "child pornography" for those minors reading the book, they need only reference the guidelines established by the American Library Association (ALA), who is our principal organization. "The American Library Association supports equal and equitable access to all library resources and services by users of all ages. Library policies and procedures that effectively deny minors equal and equitable access to all library resources and services available to other users is in violation of the American Library Association's *Library Bill of Rights*. The American Library Association opposes all attempts to restrict access to library services, materials, and facilities based on the age of library users." (ALA).

In your reconsideration form you cite the Children's Internet Protection Act; however, the American Library Association states, "children and young adults unquestionably possess First Amendment rights, including the right to receive information through the library in print, sound, images, data, social media, online applications, games, technologies, programming, and other formats. Constitutionally protected speech cannot be suppressed solely to protect children or young adults from ideas or images a legislative body believes to be unsuitable for them." (ALA). Therefore, it is up to the parents of the individual minors to decide what is appropriate for their child/youth to view, not the responsibility of the library. "Parents and guardians play a major role in guiding their child's reading and library use...each family has the right to

determine which library resources are acceptable for its children and must accord the same right to other parents.” (ALA).

It is also important to note that, “ Article I of the American Library Association’s *Library Bill of Rights* states, ‘Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.’ Article II further declares, ‘Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.’ Freedom of expression, although it can be offensive to some, is protected by the Constitution of the United States.” (ALA). Additionally, “libraries and their governing bodies have a legal and professional obligation to ensure that all members of the communities they serve have free and equitable access to a diverse range of library resources and services that is inclusive, regardless of content, approach, or format.” (ALA).

Furthermore, in your reconsideration form you state, “when teens struggle with problems like finding meaning in life or feeling different from everyone else, under the pressure of social contagion, they are more likely to try transgenderism as a solution.” However, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (“NAEYC”) encourages all institutions to promote a wide variety of access to materials that inform children of all life’s avenues. By providing youth the opportunity to have all the facts about individuals’ differences, we can avoid stereotypes, social pressures, and bias.

NAEYC has written that, “differences do not create bias. Children learn prejudice from prejudice - not from learning about human diversity. It is how people respond to differences that teaches bias and fear.” (NAEYC). Perhaps if more individuals read this graphic novel and learned of someone else’s internal struggle with self-identification, they too can relate or learn empathy and disparage anyone who would belittle or mock someone who represents as transgender and/or LGBTQIA+. Your statement in the reconsideration form, “causing more teens to experiment with LGBT behavior and suffer its poor outcomes, including disproportionately high anxiety, suicide, screen use, and sexual and dating violence” does not represent the full array of LGBTQIA+ relationships. Many heterosexual relationships and individuals also experience high anxiety, suicide, screen use, and violence. Therefore, it is vital to provide many perspectives to youth. It is important to remember, “children’s developing sense of self is hurt by name-calling, teasing, and exclusion based on identity. And children who engage in such hurtful behaviors are learning it is acceptable to hurt others, the earliest form of bullying.” (NAEYC).

Moreover, your reconsideration form states, “books containing prurient sexual material that have no redeeming social or artistic value should not be included in the library collection.” However, cannot all library materials as well as museum pieces be considered artistic expressions? Therefore, nothing should be banned so long as one person deems it as art-think of all the Romans who appreciated the human form and painted or sculpted many nudes. Remember, “all human beings share similar biological attributes, needs, and rights (e.g., the needs for food, shelter, and love; the commonalities of language, families, and feelings) and people live and meet these shared needs and rights in many different ways.” (NAEYC). What is artistic and beautiful to some may be offense to others and it is the role of the library to present the piece without regard to social bias.

With all the changes continually happening in society and around the world, “libraries are a cornerstone of the community dedicated to serving the information needs of everyone. As such, they collect and make available a wide variety of information resources representing the range of human thought and experience.” (ALA). You state in your reconsideration form, “the community deserves to trust its library. We want to have confidence that our library will make prudent local selections and as a consortium member advocate for our community and its values.” However, the United Nations Children's Fund or UNICEF states, “many changes in society are having a disproportionate, and often negative, impact on children. Transformation of the family structure, globalization, climate change, digitalization, mass migration, shifting employment patterns and a shrinking social welfare net in many countries all have strong impacts on children.” (UNICEF). Therefore, our community values should be based on providing all youth the full information of the library, without restrictions to prepare them with resources that will help through life’s challenges.

We, the reconsideration committee, thank you for bringing the alternative materials to our attention. We have reviewed the resources you submitted and will take them under consideration. If the materials meet our collection development policy, we will add them to our collection. Choosing materials that serve the needs of all our community members is a fundamental part of managing a successful library. “Libraries have diverse collections with resources from many points of view, and a library’s mission is to provide access to information for all users. All library users have the First Amendment right to borrow, read, view, and listen to library resources.” (ALA). Therefore, it is important to remember that although one individual may be offended by a library resource, others may not have the same perspective.

Should you prefer to discuss this matter further, my door is always open. Additionally, our next Board of Trustees meeting is on Thursday, April 14th, at 7pm located in our library meeting room.

Thank you again.

Caitlin C. Williams

Library Reconsideration Committee

Access to Library Resources and Services for Minors: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights. ALA: Advocacy, Legislation & Issues. (2019, November 27). Retrieved from <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/minors>

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Child Rights and Why They Matter. UNICEF. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/child-rights-why-they-matter>

How to Respond to Challenges and Concerns About Library Resources. ALA: Tools, Publications & Resources. (2021, October 7). Retrieved from <https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/respond>

Understanding Anti-Bias Education: Bringing the Four Core Goals to Every Facet of Your Curriculum. NAEYC. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/nov2019/understanding-anti-bias>