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Free Speech Groups Urge Virginia School District Revise Policy That Caused Censorship of Literary Classics

Accomack, VA, 12/12/2016- The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) is urging a Virginia school district revise its policy for responding to challenged books after it initially censored and then decided to reinstate two literary classics-- *To Kill A Mockingbird* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*— from classrooms and libraries because a parent complained about the presence of racial slurs.

Last week, NCAC [sent a letter](#) to the Accomack County School District, VA demanding the district reverse their decision to remove the two books before they evaluated the parent’s challenge. It stressed that a complaints policy that heeds to a parent’s demand prior to any form of review runs the risk of leaving curricula and reading lists in tatters. The school district subsequently ruled unanimously in favor of keeping the books and expressed interest in revising their complaints policy.

NCAC has responded by praising the district’s decision and recommending it now pursue an “innocent until proven guilty” approach to future book challenges. Such an approach would, by default, favor the retention of a challenged book in schools for the duration of the review process. Acting in this way, the letter states, will prevent the subjective opinion of a single parent overriding the perspectives and rights of everyone else. The letter is signed by the National Council of Teachers of English, the ACLU of Virginia, Authors Guild, American Booksellers for Free Expression, Association of American Publishers, Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, PEN America, American Society of Journalists and Authors and Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators.

“As the letter points out, educators and librarians recommend that challenged materials should not be removed prior to completion of a complaints process,” said Josh Zuckerman, NCAC’s Youth Free Expression Program Associate. “Such an approach accords with First Amendment principles and ensures kids’ right to read challenging and educationally valuable books.”

[READ THE LETTER](#)

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The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) is an alliance of 50 national non-profit organizations dedicated to defending freedom of thought, inquiry and expression.