

**December 9, 2016**

Dr. Ronnie E. Holden, Chairman of the School Board  
Chris Holland, Superintendent  
Accomack County Public Schools  
P.O. Box 330  
Accomac, VA, 23301

**By electronic mail:** [ronnie.holden@accomack.k12.va.us](mailto:ronnie.holden@accomack.k12.va.us)  
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Dear Dr. Holden and Superintendent Holland:

We were pleased to learn that the Accomack County School Board voted to restore *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to classrooms and school libraries in the district.

We are also encouraged by the School Board's announcement that a committee will reexamine Policy KLB, under which challenged books are temporarily removed from libraries and classrooms pending review. We write again to urge the District to revise its policies to retain challenged books in classrooms and libraries until their educational merits have been assessed. This is necessary to ensure that the educational process is not disrupted unnecessarily and that the First Amendment rights of non-objecting parents and students are not infringed upon.

This approach is consistent with the recommendations of leading educators and educational organizations. For example, the American Library Association recommends that "[n]o duly selected materials whose appropriateness is challenged shall be removed from the school except upon the recommendation of a reconsideration committee...."<sup>1</sup> A book published by Teachers College at Columbia University also promotes a model policy requiring that "challenged material remains available for use while review is under way."<sup>2</sup> NCAC likewise recommends that, to ensure compliance with First Amendment rights and principles, "**materials should never be removed prior to completion of the complaint process.**"<sup>3</sup>

While a proposed policy allowing school officials to decide to retain challenged books during the review process is a step in the right direction, it is insufficient. It is important to implement procedures that create a presumption in favor of retention of challenged materials to preclude the possibility that access to educationally valuable materials will be restricted, even temporarily. Parents who do not want their children to read a given book always have the option to restrict their own child's access or to seek an alternative assignment. The default protection of challenged books

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ala.org/bbooks/challengedmaterials/preparation/workbook-selection-policy-writing>

<sup>2</sup> ReLeah Cossett Lent & Gloria Pipkin, *Keep Them Reading: An Anti-Censorship Handbook for Educators* (Teachers College Press, 2012) [https://www.tcpress.com/filebin/PDFs/9780807757381\\_Reproducibles.pdf](https://www.tcpress.com/filebin/PDFs/9780807757381_Reproducibles.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> *The First Amendment in Schools: A Resource Guide*, <http://ncac.org/resource/first-amendment-in-schools>

and the rights of other parents will safeguard intellectual freedom and students' right to read challenging and thought-provoking works of literature.

Please let us know if we can be of any additional assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,



Joan Bertin, Executive Director  
National Coalition Against Censorship



Millie Davis, Director  
Intellectual Freedom Center  
National Council of Teachers of English



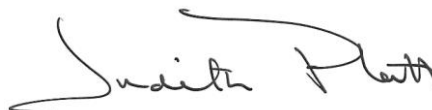
Claire Gastaña, Executive Director  
American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia



Mary Rasenberger, Executive Director  
Authors Guild



Chris Finan, Director  
American Booksellers for Free Expression



Judith Platt, Director  
Free Expression Advocacy  
Association of American Publishers



Charles Brownstein, Executive Director  
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund



Fatima Shaik, Co-Chair  
Children's and Young Adult Book Committee  
PEN America



Sally Wendkos Olds, Chair  
First Amendment Committee  
American Society of Journalists and Authors



Lin Oliver, Executive Director  
Society of Children's Book Writers and  
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