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Comic Book Legal Defense Fund

June 21, 2018

Sherry Eppelsheimer, Principal
Wando High School
1000 Warrior Way
Mount Pleasant, SC 29466

Dear Principal Eppelsheimer,

As organizations that advocate the freedom to read, we are concerned about recent reports of demands to remove two titles from the Wando High School AP summer reading list. We are writing to urge you to follow your district's well-written policies regarding material adoption and reconsideration and to offer our support in that process.

We understand that students were offered a summer reading list consisting of four books and given the option to choose among them. Thus, parents who object to particular titles — in this case *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas and *All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely — can easily direct their child to alternative texts. Yet, we understand that *The Hate U Give* and *All American Boys* have both been formally challenged in your school, triggering a reconsideration process as outlined in [Policy IJKAA](#) and [Policy KE](#).

Reportedly the books were challenged for their depiction of instances of police brutality and have been denounced by the local Fraternal Order of Police as promoting “anti-police” sentiment. Such viewpoint-based objections do not justify the removal of either *The Hate U Give* or *All American Boys* from any public school and we urge you to retain both books on the Wando High School reading list for their educational merits.

The First Amendment protects students' rights to freely think, read and inquire; public school officials risk violating these rights when they restrict access to literature solely on the basis of viewpoint rather than for legitimate pedagogical reasons. *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*, 484 U.S. 260, 261 (1988). Removing books that have been selected for their educational value solely because the ideas expressed in them conflict with some parents' political or moral beliefs would improperly allow parents to dominate the public education process with their opinions.

The Hate U Give is a critically acclaimed novel, which has been widely recommended for young readers (Finalist for the [National Book Award](#) and Boston Globe-Horn Book Award Winner). Like far too many teens in America, the novel's protagonist, 16-year old

Starr, witnesses the traumatic shooting of her unarmed best friend by a white police officer. Similarly, *All American Boys* explores 16-year old Rashad's struggle to overcome trauma and distrust of police after he is brutally beaten by an officer who wrongly suspects him of shoplifting. *Kirkus Reviews* magazine and *Publishers Weekly* regard both books as “[necessary, important](#),” “[all-too-timely](#),” “[deeply moving](#),” and “[heartbreakingly topical](#).”

Books provide a safe space for students to explore difficult issues and ideas as they grow into a greater understanding of themselves and the world around them. For young readers in Charleston, *The Hate U Give* and *All American Boys* offer insight into the racial injustices many people of color experience and inspiration for young activists who desire change.

While not every student may feel prepared to engage such issues, no single parent – or administrator, community member, or police association – should have the ability to deprive all Wando High School students of the opportunity to do so. Rather than restrict your reading list, we urge you to instead encourage your students to read diverse viewpoints and engage them in critical discussion about social issues. In reconsidering these books, we ask that your review committee focus on their educational value as a whole and take into account the fact that the summer reading list already offers alternative readings for those students whose parents may object to the two books under consideration.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to us for more guidance on protecting the right to read.

Sincerely,



Chris Finan, Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship



Charles Brownstein, Executive Director
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund



David Grogan, Executive Director
American Booksellers For Free Expression



Mary Rasenberger, Executive Director
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Cc: Dr. Gerrita Postlewait, Superintendent
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