

Linda Schiller, President
Board of Directors
Andover Public Library
1511 E. Central Ave
Andover, Kansas 67002

Sent via electronic mail: lschiller@andoverlibrary.org

February 8, 2019

Dear Ms. Schiller,

As advocates for free expression and intellectual freedom rights, we write to support the Andover Public Library Director's recommendation to keep *I Am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel, *Lily and Dunkin* by Donna Gephart, and *George* by Alex Gino in the children's book section.

We understand that in September 2018 a community member objected to the books on "moral" grounds. In keeping with established policy on the reconsideration of library materials, the Andover Public Library director convened a committee to review the books and ultimately accepted its recommendation to keep them in their designated youth sections. The complainant subsequently appealed the decision.

As you consider the appeal, we ask you to reaffirm your First Amendment obligations and also note that restricting or removing these books would raise serious concerns about discrimination based on sexual orientation.

In requesting reconsideration, the community member emphasized the library's "moral responsibility" to "protect children from this kind of reading" and criticizes Andover Library for "exposing [children] to things that are not age appropriate, and [pinning] the responsibility to parents and say it's up to them to monitor what their children read [*sic*]."

As a public institution, the library's primary responsibility is to uphold the First Amendment, which guarantees the right of all young people in Andover to read and learn, absent from bias or viewpoint restriction. It is crucial that libraries offer access to a broad diversity of ideas and foster open exchange of perspectives. Libraries should strongly resist efforts by any individual or group to impose their own subjective ideas of morality on the general public.

The challenged books are critically acclaimed and readers of all ages can benefit from their uplifting messages of unconditional love and acceptance. [Voice of Young](#)

[Advocates](#) calls *Lily and Dunkin* “a story that will speak not just to one specific community but to humanity as a whole.” It’s “ordinariness that makes [*I Am Jazz*] special,” according to [Common Sense Media](#), which recommends the book as a “straightforward” autobiographical story that “will resonate both with families discussing gender identity and with children who feel different from their peers in other ways.” *Kirkus Reviews* and *People Magazine* call *George* a “warm, funny, and inspiring” book that “will resonate with anyone who has ever felt different.”

Far too many young LGBTQ people do feel different and marginalized, placing them at heightened risk of mental illness. It is especially important that young people who feel stigmatized and silenced do not face additional obstacles in finding books that reflect their experiences and lead them towards hope and self-acceptance.

The suppression of LGBTQ books further marginalizes a vulnerable minority group. It creates a toxic culture in public spaces, especially the library where everyone should be equally welcome and guaranteed freedom to read, think and explore new ideas.

We praise your original decision in this case and urge you to continue to adhere to your established challenge procedures, which helps educate your patrons on the importance of your policies of free expression and nondiscrimination. To assist you, we gladly share the attached information guide on defending the freedom to read LGBTQ books.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for further guidance. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Chris Finan, Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship



Charles Brownstein, Executive Director
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund



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



David Grogan, Executive Director
American Booksellers for Free Expression

Cc: Tom Taylor, Director
Andover Public Library