

**NATIONAL  
COALITION  
AGAINST  
CENSORSHIP** **KIDS'  
RIGHT  
TO READ**

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American Booksellers for  
Free Expression  
Comic Book Legal Defense  
Fund

July 18, 2019

Troy Hill, Mayor  
City of Leander  
201 North Brushy Street  
Leander, Texas 78641

**Sent via Electronic Mail to:** [thill@leandertx.gov](mailto:thill@leandertx.gov)

Dear Mayor Hill,

As organizations dedicated to promoting freedom of expression, we defend young people's right to access public programming without government viewpoint discrimination. We were disturbed to learn that Leander City Council officials abruptly cancelled an appearance by Lilah Sturges at the Leander Public Library. We understand that the Council has instituted a temporary oversight policy for library events, but the unannounced expansion of that policy to prevent a renowned author from speaking at a regular weekly book club strongly suggests viewpoint and gender bias. **We call on you to uphold the First Amendment and immediately lift the discriminatory restrictions on Lilah Sturges's speaking engagement.**

Sturges is a prominent graphic novelist and prose author whose published works include *Jack of Fables*, *Thor: Season One*, *House of Mystery*, *Lumberjanes: Infernal Compass*, and *The Magicians: Alice's Story*. Sturges is also transgender.

We are aware that, in response to protests against LGBTQ-inclusive programming in June, the city initiated a review of library event policies and has temporarily barred external groups from using library meeting rooms without prior approval by city staff. However, Lilah Sturges's talk was neither scheduled to take place in a library meeting room, nor was it organized by an external group. As early as May 2019, Leander Library management invited Sturges to attend its graphic novel club's July 9<sup>th</sup> meeting to discuss her *Lumberjanes* series. Shortly after scheduling the event, library management met with city officials and notified them of Sturges's planned visit. No city officials objected.

Despite these facts, on July 9<sup>th</sup>, city officials cancelled the event hours before Sturges was to appear, citing an expanded event policy that imposed a background check requirement. Officials demanded that Sturges submit to a screening before her talk could be rescheduled. Sturges has indicated that, were she informed in time, she would submit to a background check.

It appears that prejudice and not process motivated the cancellation of Lilah Sturges's book club talk. As per *Island Trees School District v. Pico*, [457 U.S. 853](#) (1982), the library is "the principal locus of (intellectual) freedom" and public officials violate the Constitution by restricting content "simply because they dislike the ideas."

Since adopting temporary event policy, Sturges is the only guest speaker to be denied access to the library. Several youth events have been held in meeting rooms without city official review, including a Mad Science children's event during the week Sturges was scheduled to speak. Guest speakers unaffiliated with the library, like REPCO Wildlife, have since been allowed access to library spaces and young patrons without background checks or prior city approval. **This capricious application of expanded restrictions strongly suggests a bias against Sturges's gender identity and a gross violation of First Amendment principles.**

Ultimately, the greatest victims of this discrimination are Leander's youth, many of whom rely upon the library for intellectual, personal and social exploration. Lilah Sturges's work addresses themes of identity, positive representation, coping with prejudice, and self-actualization. She has contributed to prominent franchises of interest to teen readers. Her professional perspective is uniquely valuable to the library's graphic novel club. And Sturges's visibility as a trans author is especially valuable for LGBTQ youth whose experiences are far too often marginalized and underrepresented.

**We strongly urge you to reschedule her event as soon as is practical.**

Thank you.

Sincerely,



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National Coalition Against Censorship



Charles Brownstein, Executive Director  
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund



Millie Davis, Director  
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National Council of Teachers of English



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