

ALA American Library Association

Office for Intellectual Freedom

November 19, 2019

Upshur County Public Library Board
1150 Route 20 South Rd,
Buckhannon, WV 26201

Dear Members of the Upshur County Public Library Board,

We understand that you are currently addressing a challenge to the Upshur County Public Library's placement and handling of the book *Prince and Knight*, based on a complaint that the book is not appropriate for the children's room of a public library.

Prince and Knight is a picture book written for young readers that is both age appropriate and developmentally appropriate. While it may not be right for every family of Upshur County, it unquestionably serves the information needs of many of the families and young people residing in Upshur County. It is a popular, award-winning book, well-reviewed and sought out by many library users, particularly those families that want and need books that depict LGBTQ+ themes and characters. While we firmly believe that parents know their children best and should guide their children's reading, one parent's — or community member's — belief that a book is inappropriate for their family should not be grounds for restricting that title when the book may be a treasured favorite for other children and other families.

Public libraries are shared community institutions intended to serve the information needs of everyone who resides in the community. In particular, the public library has a responsibility to represent a broad range of materials in its collection and to meet the needs of everyone in the community it serves — not just the most vocal, the most powerful, or even the majority. Individual library users have the right to voice their concerns about a library book and select different materials for themselves and their own families, but those objecting to particular books should not be given the power to restrict other users' right to access those books. For this reason, we encourage you, as members of the Upshur County Public Library Board, to uphold the library's strong policies in support of collection diversity and individual choice and keep *Prince and Knight* in the children's collection.

Under the best professional standards applicable to libraries, librarians, and library trustees, those charged with reviewing challenged materials are asked to set aside their personal beliefs and evaluate the work in light of the objective standards outlined in the library's materials selection policy. The Upshur County Public Library Material Selection Policy, as adopted by its board on

August 14, 2012, states that it incorporates, and abides by, the principles expressed in the *Library Bill of Rights*. Those principles counsel against any action that censors or restricts library users' access to library materials, including those that feature LGBTQ+ characters or address LGBTQ+ themes. This includes books and library materials written for children and youth. Library policies and procedures that effectively deny children and youth equal and equitable access to library resources intended for their use and available to other library users violate young peoples' First Amendment right to freely access all library services, materials, and facilities. This includes the use of restrictive shelving.

These are not abstract statements of principle. In *Sund v. City of Wichita Falls, Texas*, 121 F. Supp. 2d 530 (N.D. Texas, 2000), a federal district court held that a city council's resolution that required the public library to place *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate*, two LGBTQ-themed children's books, on a restricted shelf in the adult area of the library violated both adults' and minors' First Amendment right to receive information in the library. More specifically, it ruled that removing books from the children's area of the library to the adult section because of a citizen group's disapproval of the ideas and themes contained in those books was content-based and viewpoint-based discrimination that violated library users' First Amendment rights and placed a significant burden on every patron's right to access the books, regardless of age. The court specifically rejected the argument that retaining the book in the adult collection mitigated the burdens on both adults' and children's First Amendment rights of access.

Our Constitution and Bill of Rights promises every person the right and equal opportunity to discover, develop, and defend their own political, social, and religious beliefs. Restricting access to materials based upon the ideas and views expressed in the work represents both content and viewpoint discrimination that is contrary to the spirit of the First Amendment's promise of freedom of speech, freedom of belief, and the freedom to read.

We strongly urge the library board to reaffirm the importance and value of the freedom to read by retaining *Prince and Knight* in the library's children's collection. By insuring free and full access to a diverse selection of materials without restriction, so that every member of your community is free to choose – or not choose – the materials in question for themselves and their families, the board will send a strong message to the community: that in this country, not only does everyone have the freedom to read, everyone in the community has a place at the library.

Sincerely,



Deborah Caldwell-Stone
Director
Office for Intellectual Freedom
American Library Association



Megan H. Tarbett
President
West Virginia Library
Association



Chris Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against
Censorship