

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

November 28, 2022

Board of Trustees
Conroe Independent School District
3205 W. Davis
Conroe, Texas 77304

Re: Removal of *The Handmaid's Tale*

Dear Members of the Board of Trustees,

The National Coalition Against Censorship is an alliance of national nonprofit groups dedicated to protecting freedom of expression, including the rights of K-12 students, teachers and staff. We are writing in response to reports that the District has removed all copies of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* from school libraries.

In a letter we sent to the School Board in August of this year, we shared our concerns about the District's new policy requiring that challenged books that are reasonably likely to be legally obscene or "harmful to minors" under state law must be removed pending adjudication. We noted that the policy might be problematic because books might be improperly removed by district employees who are not familiar with the relevant state law.

We are writing again because it seems that our apprehension was well-founded. As we understand it, *The Handmaid's Tale* was removed because District staff feared that it might violate the aforementioned state law. Under that law, a book is "harmful to minors" only if, among other things, 1) its "dominant theme taken as a whole . . . appeals to the prurient interest of a minor, in sex, nudity, or excretion," **and** 2) it is "utterly without redeeming social value for minors."

A Handmaid's Tale clearly does not fit either of those elements of state law. First, the "dominant theme" of this book is obviously not "appeal[ing] to the prurient interest of a minor, in sex, nudity, or excretion." The National Council of Teachers of English summarizes the book as "an account of a woman's life in an oppressive society [that] gives readers a look at important social issues such as human rights, family roles, gender roles, political pressures, suicide, and depression."

Second, *The Handmaid's Tale* is clearly not "utterly without redeeming social value for minors." It has received many awards, including the 1986 *Los Angeles Times* Best Fiction Award and the 1987 Arthur C. Clarke Award for Best Science Fiction. It was also nominated for the Booker Prize, which is awarded for the best novel written in English and published in the United Kingdom or Ireland; and for the Nebula Award, which is given annually to the best works of science fiction or fantasy published in the

United States. Moreover, it is included in high school libraries and curriculums across the country and has at least twice been tested on the AP English Literature exam.

Therefore, we urge you to return the book to library shelves and ensure that District employees understand the requirements of state law, particularly the very narrow definition of "harmful to minors."

Please contact us if we can be helpful.

Sincerely,



Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

Cc: Carrie Galatas, CISD General Counsel

Co-signed by: American Booksellers for Free Expression
The Authors Guild
Children's and Young Adult Books Committee, PEN America

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