

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

October 31, 2022

School Board
The School District of Escambia County, Florida
75 North Pace Blvd
Pensacola, Florida 32505

Dear Members of the School Board,

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 previously wrote in regard to the Superintendent's decision to restrict access to challenged library books during the review process. We are now concerned about a proposal before the Board to make that practice official policy for a subset of challenges.

Specifically, we are concerned with the provision of your proposed policy that says, "Any material challenged on the basis that it contains content that is pornographic or ["harmful to minors"] shall be placed in a Restricted Access Area of the Library/Media Center until a decision has been made by the District Materials Review Committee or Board."

This is problematic because it is very unlikely that the District's professional educators have purchased books that are pornographic or "harmful to minors." For example, under Florida law, a book cannot be "harmful to minors" unless "Taken as a whole, [it] is without serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value for minors." (*FS 847.001*). Obviously, books that have passed the rigorous selection process for inclusion in school libraries have value for students. In our experience, claims that books are pornographic are often frivolous. For example, *Slaughterhouse Five*, *Maus*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Diary of Anne Frank* have all been alleged to be pornographic.

Despite these facts, under the proposed policy, student access to valuable books will be limited even though the claims that they are "harmful to minors" are meritless and therefore, such challenges to books will ultimately be rejected. If adopted, the proposed policy will needlessly harm students.

As we noted in our previous letter, limiting access to challenged books will encourage people who wish to restrict students' exposure to ideas they dislike to file meritless challenges. Therefore, the proposed policy will waste the District's time and resources in adjudicating baseless claims.

For these reasons, we encourage the Board to reject the proposal to restrict access to challenged books during the review process.

Please contact us if we can be helpful.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,



Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

Co-signed by: American Booksellers for Free Expression
The Authors Guild
Children's and Young Adult Books Committee, PEN America
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
National Council of Teachers of English
PEN America

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