July 13, 2023

Board of Trustees
Rockwell Falls Public Library
19 Main Street
Lake Luzerne, NY 12846

Sent via email to kmrlibrary@gmail.com, jsilburn.rfpl@gmail.com, joshjacquard.rfpl@gmail.com, joneskat73@gmail.com

Dear Members of the Board,

As a nonpartisan organization dedicated to freedom of speech, thought, and the right to read, the National Coalition Against Censorship is alarmed by the Rockwell Falls Public Library’s postponement and subsequent cancellation of the April 15 Drag Queen Story Hour, as well as recent suggestions from members of your cohort that the Library should remove any books that encompass LGBTQ+ themes or topics that purportedly relate to Critical Race Theory. Public libraries are government-run institutions, and so are prohibited from restricting access to materials based on viewpoints that are expressed in them. We urge you to uphold this principle of viewpoint neutrality, and to support your staff in its programming and acquisition decisions.

It is our understanding that there was controversy in the community, expressed at a Library Board meeting following the public announcement of the Drag Queen Story Hour to take place at Rockwell Falls Public Library. The Board responded to community members opposing the event, by deciding to “postpone” it so as to conduct “additional research” into the performer and the planned reading. To date, the results of any such research have not materialized, and the event no longer appears slated for rescheduling.

The de facto cancellation of the event in the face of viewpoint-based opposition raises serious First Amendment concerns. These concerns are aggravated by recent calls, coming from a member of the Board, to remove books containing LGBTQ characters or issues, or books exploring themes of racial diversity or marginalized histories from the library collection.

Such censorship, aside from the First Amendment concerns it raises, also violates the fundamental purpose of a library. Books and programming representing a wide variety of voices allow patrons of all ages and all backgrounds to find connection and context for experiences they are already
having, to safely explore unfamiliar ideas, and broaden their understanding of
the world. When a public library has a policy of inviting people to read to
children, it cannot exclude specific readers because public servants or patrons
dislike their message.

Some board trustees and community members may disagree with the contents
of certain events or books based on their own political or religious beliefs. They are entitled to avoid such materials, and to prevent their own children
from seeing them. But they cannot prevent others from doing so. Libraries
exist to serve every individual in the community, and therefore cannot accede
to demands by any group of parents to censor the library’s holdings in order
to conform with their political or religious beliefs.

We urge each of you to uphold your responsibility to serve every member of
your community, including those who have views with which you disagree.

Signed:
National Coalition Against Censorship
The Authors Guild
American Library Association
Children's and Young Adult Books Committee, PEN America

cc: Courtney Keir, Library Director, Rockwell Falls Public Library