

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

July 6, 2023

School Board
Sparta Township Public Schools
18 Mohawk Avenue
Sparta, NJ 07871

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 have almost 50 years of experience advising public institutions in developing best practices that are consistent with First Amendment principles. We are writing in regard to recent proposed updates to the Sparta Township Library Resource Materials Policy and Regulation 2530.

We are concerned about the blanket ban on acquiring library books which contain "lewd or vulgar content." The words "lewd" and "vulgar" are not defined. At the same time, the policy references "sexualized" and "profane" content but appears to treat it differently than "lewd" or "vulgar" works. Such vagueness is problematic because regulations that include undefined terms create the risk that unconventional, unpopular, or controversial ideas may be censored.

In addition, the ban on acquiring material with "lewd or vulgar content" is overly broad. Most districts allow high school students to have access to books that include some lewd or vulgar content, but are nevertheless valuable. Many great works of fiction or nonfiction include some language that could be deemed lewd or vulgar and hence would be excluded under the proposed draft of the policy. For example, many works of Shakespeare include lewd or vulgar dialogue.

Therefore, we recommend that you amend the proposed policy to clearly define the terms "lewd" and "vulgar" and permit the acquisition of materials which have such content but nevertheless have educational value for students.

Thank you for your attention and consideration to this matter.

Warmest regards,



Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

CC: Superintendent Dr. Matthew Beck

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

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