

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

March 26, 2024

Board of Education
Roane County School District
105 Bluff Rd.
Kingston, TN 37763

Dear Members,

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 for book challenge policies that are consistent with First Amendment principles. We understand that these are emotionally charged issues and therefore we are writing to suggest slight, but important, changes to Board Policy 4.403 *Library Materials*.

As we understand it, almost 200 books were challenged by community members and temporarily removed from school libraries during the review process in compliance with board policy. The Board Policy states that "Challenged materials will be removed from circulation during the reconsideration process." We would like to suggest that you could avoid potential controversy and better serve students by revising your procedures to keep challenged materials on library shelves pending adjudication.

We are concerned that the policy is an open invitation to would-be censors to file meritless challenges for the sole purpose of limiting students' access to books they dislike. For example, in Beaufort County Schools in South Carolina, a similar policy led to nearly a hundred books being challenged in October 2022. According to media reports, the review process wasn't completed until March 2024, when most of the books were returned to library shelves. Thus, the district was forced to spend huge amounts of time adjudicating baseless claims while students were deprived of access to valuable books for months. Your policy risks exposing your students to a similar fate.

For these reasons, many library policies include an explicit requirement that access to books remain unrestricted during the reconsideration process. We encourage you to adopt a similar policy.

We have created a resource to help school officials address the problem of book challenges, *Material Review and Policy Guidelines and Examples*, which includes sample book challenge procedures from school districts across the country. It is attached.

Please let us know if you have any questions or need any further support.

Thank you for your attention and consideration to this matter.

Sincerely,



Christine Emeran
Youth Free Expression Program 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
National Council of Teachers of English

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