

NATIONAL [REDACTED] [REDACTED] COALITION AGAINST [REDACTED] [REDACTED] CENSORSHIP

December 22, 2025

Board of Library Commissioners
630 West 5th Street
Los Angeles, CA 90071

Sent via email to libcommission@lapl.org

Dear President Valadez and Commissioners,

I am writing on behalf of the National Coalition Against Censorship's Arts and Culture Advocacy Program, which defends the right of artists to participate in democratic dialogue and the right of the public to access those works. We engage in direct advocacy on behalf of artists, authors, and others censored from presenting their work, and track trends of censorship.

We are concerned to learn of the Los Angeles Public Library's (LAPL) decision to cancel a Read Palestine Week talk just days before it was scheduled to take place. The December event was to feature discussion between Jenan Matar, author of the children's book *Everything Grows in Jiddo's Garden*, and Nora Lester Murad, author of the young adult book *Ida in the Middle*. While the library's promotional materials describe the event as one in which the authors would "talk about their books and the influence of Palestine on their stories," LAPL later claimed that event was inconsistent with its mission and policies. This sudden retraction threatens the diversity and excellence of the library's public programming and undermines its core mission, which is why we have included the incident in our [Art Censorship Index: Israel and Palestine 2023-Onwards](#), which captures threats to creative freedom because works or their creators conceivably comment on the Israel-Palestine conflict. As a public institution subject to First Amendment compliance, we urge LAPL to reschedule the event and create policies to prevent such censorship in the future.

It is our understanding that the authors were invited to headline a talk at the library and had signed contracts confirming their participation. In the weeks leading up to the event, LAPL staff told Matar they faced pressure to censor the event because of a complaint the library received regarding the author's online commentary addressing violence in Gaza. Matar offered a statement for the library to use that explained the author's perspective, distinguished antisemitism from anti-Zionism, and affirmed the library's position to uphold freedom of expression. In the days following, LAPL canceled the event.

According to a statement given to *The LA Reporter*, LAPL's decision to cancel this event was to help ensure that the library's spaces are used "in a manner consistent with [its] mission, city standards, and [its] commitment to city residents, including those who may carry different

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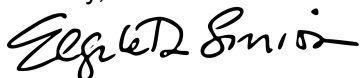
perspectives.” It is unclear how the event would have conflicted with LAPL’s mission, which is to “[provide] free and easy access to information, ideas, books and technology that enrich, educate, and empower every individual in our city’s diverse communities.” Instead, it would seem that Matari’s pro-Palestinian advocacy and activism provoked the library’s actions. The author frequently expresses support for Palestine and has long posted about the humanitarian and political crisis of Palestinians.

We are aware that presenting cultural programming featuring vocal pro-Palestine authors can be challenging in this politically polarized moment; however, a public library should be able to meet this challenge. The cancellation of the event precludes a meaningful opportunity to foster conversation between LAPL’s diverse communities on exactly what it means to be Palestinian or connected to Palestine at this moment. Indeed, this very conversation was to include authors from Jewish and Palestinian communities.

As a public institution, LAPL must serve not only the critics of these books, but also the authors who write them, and readers who enjoy them. If the library were to remove all content or cancel all events that draw an objection from some section of its diverse constituency, its offerings would be catastrophically reduced and its mission derailed. The only way that the library can fulfill its mission is by ensuring that diverse perspectives can be heard. Despite perennial calls to censor libraries’ offerings, it is regularly (and rightly) pointed out that the presence of a given book on a library’s shelves does not mean that the library endorses the ideas expressed therein. The same principles apply to events hosted by the library.

Instead of preventing discussion of an important and sensitive political subject—and thus becoming vulnerable to future calls to remove *any* material that draws controversy—we urge the Los Angeles Public Library to reschedule the talk between Matari and Murad. It should also establish a policy prohibiting the cancellation of events over audience complaints. Such a policy would help the library achieve its mission and insulate it from potential constitutional liability under the First Amendment for engaging in viewpoint-based censorship.¹ Please let us know if we can be of assistance as you consider the creation of new policies.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Larison

Director of Arts and Culture Advocacy, National Coalition Against Censorship

¹ See, e.g., *Rosenberger v. Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia*, 515 U.S. 819, 829 (1995) (“Viewpoint discrimination is thus an egregious form of content discrimination. The government must abstain from regulating speech when the specific motivating ideology or the opinion or perspective of the speaker is the rationale for the restriction.”).