

To the Trustees of the Whiting Library,

I am submitting my statement on the board's issue with the scheduling of the program Drag Queen Story Hour for your information before the meeting at which it will be discussed on May 10th. Since I have been informed that it is "TBD" whether I will be able to speak about this at the meeting, I am submitting this in writing for your consideration.

I would like to start by pointing out that there is no precedent for library employees to seek prior approval for programs at the library. The trustees hire the library director and charge the library staff with putting on programs. As the program in question fits within the mission and strategic goals of the Whiting Library as well as the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights, it was unforeseeable that any issue would arise. To accuse staff of blindsiding the board is unfounded. The board should not make up new rules and reprimand employees for not complying with previously unstated rules.

For the board to demand that library employees censor materials or programs is against our policies and against what we stand for as an organization. We do not allow patrons to pull books off the shelves they deem offensive and the board is also not allowed to engage in this type of censorship. Without a formal written policy on challenges to programs, it is standard practice to defer to the written policy on challenges to materials. This is in accordance with the [Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights on Library Initiated Programs and Displays](#). Here I quote:

"Concerns, questions, or complaints about library-initiated programs and displays are handled according to the same written policy and procedures that govern reconsiderations of other library resources. These policies should apply equally to all people, including, but not limited to, library users, staff, and members of the governing body. The policies should set forth the library's commitment to free and open access to information and ideas for all users.

Programs should not be canceled because of the ideas or topics of the program or the views expressed by the participants or speakers, nor should library workers censor or remove displays because someone may disagree with the content. Library sponsorship of a program does not constitute an endorsement of the program content or the views expressed by the participants or speakers, any more than the purchase of resources for the library collection or curation of a display constitutes an endorsement of the resources content or its creator's views. Libraries should vigorously defend the First Amendment right of speakers and participants to express themselves."

I encourage the Board of Trustees to familiarize themselves with the [Library Bill of Rights](#) and its interpretations. I am a member of the American Library Association, I studied these principles while obtaining my Masters degree in Library Science, and I believe in them as an individual striving to do the work of a professional librarian. The library also states in our policies that we follow this Library Bill of Rights. It is your role as a trustee to familiarize yourself with the profession of librarianship so that you can understand the work you are helping to support in this community. If this isn't work that you support or believe in, perhaps the library board is not the right place for you.

As demonstrated in the Library Bill of Rights, libraries have a duty to offer a forum for diverse ideas, especially to those who have been historically denied freedom of expression. Since I have worked in this library I have put up displays for LGBTQ+ Pride Month, decorated the place with pride flags, purchased many books with a LGBTQ+ focus both fiction and non-fiction, shared Vermont Pride events on our Facebook Page, organized book clubs where we specifically discuss books about LGBTQ+ culture, and have encouraged Carrie to do the same in the youth department.

This year we continued our routine work of celebrating Pride Month and promoting summer reading by engaging a nationally recognized LGBTQ+ story time organization to put on a much beloved program in the state of Vermont, one supported by the Vermont Department of Libraries that comes with rave reviews. To get this instantaneous feedback from the chair of the board to censor our program with LGBTQ+ positive role models was surprising and extremely disheartening. I was shocked and insulted to be shamed and reprimanded for this hard work.

The labeling of LGBTQ+ events as too "controversial" for the library is the exact opposite message that I want to send the children of this community. They deserve better. They deserve a world that welcomes them, represents them, and celebrates them. The least the library can do is contribute to the creation of that world by offering a safe space, resources, and programs that reflect them. All of them.

As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I know what it feels like to be marginalized, unrepresented, to be afraid to show up, and to feel unsafe. How should I interpret this immediate shutdown of LGBTQ+ program leaders at the library for me as a worker here? Is it not okay to say gay in this library? You can apologize all you want by saying you have the best interests of the library at heart, but you don't here. What's in the best interest of the library is to be a welcoming, safe, and inclusive space as requested by our community and needed by the staff.

During the community conversations the library held in the fall, DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) was highlighted as a *core area* of strategic focus that the community wants to see at the library. The board was at these conversations, they *know* that is what people are asking for, so why this backlash? If it's a simple matter of wanting to know what programs are coming up ahead of time, why not just ask for that information in staff reports to the board? Why censorship, silencing, tabling discussion, and threat of canceling our work?

I request that board members who take issue with Drag Queen Story Time submit a well-considered formal complaint instead of yelling at me to censor a library program minutes after it was announced. I'm ashamed that this is happening in Chester at Whiting Library. The community deserves better and so do I.

Sincerely,
Deirdre Doran

Attachment: formal complaint for the reconsideration of library materials