



541 E. Tennessee St. ▪ Ste. 103 ▪ Tallahassee, FL 32308 ▪ 850-270-9205 ▪ www.flalib.org

President Joe Negron
305 Senate Office Building
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

1 May 2017

Dear Honorable President Negron,

I am writing on behalf of the members of the Florida Library Association. As Florida Senate Bill 1210 moves through the legislative process, we have learned more about its impact on school library services. Our members urge you to reconsider this bill for several reasons.

First, the bill opens the challenge process to non-parents in a very broad way. While we understand that community members are concerned about the quality and content of material available to K-12 students, opening the process to non-parents invites a significant increase in challenges. The voice of parents could be overwhelmed by those not directly involved in the school system and with no children at stake. Parents and educators work in partnership to make education decisions for students. Non-parents should not be permitted to interfere in this process.

Second, the grounds for challenge presented in the bill are vague. The term "pornographic" is open to wide interpretation. For example, Toni Morrison's classic novel *Beloved* is occasionally challenged on grounds that it is pornographic. Morrison is a Nobel Prize winning author and her works are regarded as part of the American literature canon. Notably, in 2015 Collier County Public Schools voted to retain this work and several others after they were challenged for a variety of reasons, including being called "pornographic."

SB1210's text also permits challenges based on whether a book "is not suited to student needs and their ability to comprehend the material presented, or is inappropriate for the grade level and age group for which the material is used" (94-97). Such reasoning is far too general, allowing for contentious and resource-consuming challenges without the careful consideration and documentation currently required. Materials already undergo a review process by qualified media specialists and school district administrators. This bill will only support an increase in the number of challenges a school district will face.

Third, including an "unbiased hearing officer" upends the process the school district and its elected officials have established. It shifts authority away from the collective decision making body to a third party. Combined with the ease of bringing forward a challenge, the school board could become inundated with challenges. Ultimately, the expertise of educators and the decision making ability of parents for their children will be diminished by outside influences.

Instead of moving this bill forward, we urge you to keep existing process in place. We believe that most cases of challenged works are reviewed fairly by local school districts under existing policies.

If the Florida Library Association can assist in any way, please contact us and we will be glad offer our guidance.

Sincerely,

Elana Karshmer, M.A., M.A. (LIS)

President, Florida Library Association



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Speaker Richard Corcoran
420 The Capitol
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

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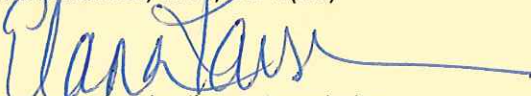
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