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The Honorable Rick Scott
Governor of Florida
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

June 2, 2017

Dear Governor Scott,

I am writing on behalf of the members of the Florida Library Association to express our opposition to House Bill 989, the Instructional Materials bill. We are concerned about the possible negative impacts on the quality of public education, and the potential for unwarranted censorship in our school libraries. Our members urge you to veto 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 overpowered by those without children who are not directly involved in the school system.

Second, the grounds for presenting challenges 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. Students should not be deprived of opportunities to study highly acclaimed literature due to the disapproval of a vocal minority.

The bill permits challenges to and banning of books based on an arbitrary view of a student’s ability to comprehend material presented, and can be based a non-parent’s view of a book’s inappropriateness for grade level and age group. These reasons are far too general and would likely bring forward contentious and resource-consuming challenges. Materials already undergo a review process by qualified media specialists and school district administrators, and there are existing input mechanisms for parents.

Additionally, this bill may lead to a chilling effect whereby those responsible for selection are deterred from selecting books which may be objectionable to some members of the community. Many of the most treasured books are those that cause the reader to think and question and discuss. Not having such thought provoking titles available for students to read and discuss would be a disservice to them.

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.

On behalf of the Florida Library Association I ask that you veto HB 989. We believe this bill is unnecessary since policies are already in place to fairly and objectively review challenged materials.

If the Florida Library Association can assist in any way, please contact us.

Sincerely,



Robin Shader, MLS
President, Florida Library Association