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THE POLITICAL LIBRARIAN

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The Political Librarian is published biannually by the EveryLibrary Institute NFP, a public and tax policy non-profit for libraries. The Political Librarian is dedicated to expanding the discussion of, promoting research on, and helping to re-envision locally focused advocacy, policy, and funding issues for libraries.

Series Editor: ANDREW T. SULAVIK, **MLIS, ThD**
Editorial Support: MARTHA McGEHEE
Editorial Support: SANOBAR CHAGANI, MLIS

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Correspondence: Please address all editorial correspondance to The Political Librarian's series editor, Andrew Sulavik, email: atsulavik@yahoo.com. Any correspondence specific to EveryLibrary Institute and its work should be sent to executive director, John Chrastka, email: john.chrastka@everylibrary.org.

The Political Librarian

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This Issue

This issue addresses the recent spate of challenges and book bans that impede collection development processes and practices in today's charged political environment. Additionally, it includes articles and reports that discuss policies, legislation, library funding, staffing, and praxis that sustain collection development policies that promote diverse materials and content.

Our opening article, "Legislating Librarianship Redux" by Jill A. Work, argues for the defense of local librarians and library boards to create collections that reflect their local populations, but also to curate balanced collections that reflect a variety of viewpoints, genres, cultures and ideologies. Work impressively culls together a well-documented roster of legislative cases that seek to impede the authority of local librarians and library boards to develop broader, more diverse collections. This list of legislations signals an alarming escalation in the scope of legislative hurdles designed to constrain intellectual freedom in school and public libraries.

The second article, "Not Doing It: Avoidance and Sex-Related Materials in Libraries" by Rebeca C. Jefferson and Ewa Dziedzic-Elliott, draws attention to a seldom recognized issue: Are we as librarians doing enough to develop library collections that provide an adequate level of access to materials related to sex, gender, and sexuality that our patrons need? As our authors astutely point out such materials and the librarians who acquire them are under external, pre-emptive assaults, including threats of legal action, personal attack, and targeted harassment campaigns. On the other hand, librarians face internal struggles and sometimes must navigate obstacles of affective discomfort, uncertainty, and emotional reactivity around sexual issues. These internal struggles often lead to avoidance of collection development tasks in this area, and result in unintended, real-world consequences for vulnerable populations.

Bill Crowly's white paper, "Socially Just Library Management in Conservative America," identifies some of the cultural challenges that face progressive library directors and administrators, particularly in public libraries, operating within conservative Republican municipalities and counties. The author offers pragmatic advice and approaches to deal effectively with the thorny issues of critical race theory, African-American-white relations, identity politics, and advancing social justice within conservative districts.

The final four pieces discuss library funding and staffing, of which two are reports. "Funding Our Priorities: Comparisons of Public Library Funding and Services with Other Sectors in Post-COVID America," by A. J. Million and Jenny Bossaller reports on public library expenditures, staffing and revenue data, and compares overlapping services with other local government services, such as fire protection, policing and schools, in order to assess the current state of library funding and support. "School Library Staffing Ratios and Student Outcomes: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom," by EveryLibrary Institute Staff

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reports and analyzes the current data available on the impact of school libraries and librarians and media specialists. It includes a broad diagnosis and establishes general goals for all advocates to be effective. Peter D. Pearson's white paper, "Sustaining Local Library Advocacy in Today's Political Environment," offers advice for navigating local library advocacy efforts through two straits: sustainable operational funding and the library's commitment to intellectual freedom, which is chiefly embodied in its unimpeded ability to develop an integral collection that serves the entire community. Our final article, "Less Whining, More Dining: The Importance of Relationship Building in Library Advocacy," by Michael Carlozzi joins theory with praxis. The author applies research by Cheryl Stenström and Ken Haycock on the theory of "liking" developed by Robert Ciadini's framework of interpersonal influence, which posited six tactics for influencing decision makers, to the practical work of increasing library funding at two library locations: the Wareham Free Library in Massachusetts, and the East Providence Public Library in Rhode Island. His advice and proven experience suggests that if one approaches local funding authorities as people who may like you, they may be more inclined to fund your library.

Andrew T. Sulavik
Series Editor

The Zero-Sum Mindset and Efforts to Defund ALA

ANDREW T. SULAVIK

Recently I attended a four-hour public meeting. At its conclusion the Sarasota County Commission promptly voted to defund the county public library system's institutional membership to the American Library Association (ALA). Among the residential population a minority-held view to defund ALA membership defeated the status quo. The County Commission members gave little or no reason for their vote. It was difficult to imagine what mindset shaped such a lopsided outcome. Because this scenario is repeatedly playing out throughout the country at both state and local levels, the rationale behind it needs to be understood before steps to curtail it can be taken.

What precipitated this movement? Ostensibly, it resulted from remarks published on Twitter by the current president of ALA, Emily Drabinski, concerning her identity and political beliefs. Members of Moms for Liberty, a relatively small organization, whose expressed mission is to "stand up for parental rights at all levels of government," seized on her remarks to argue that the county should no longer pay for the public library's ALA membership because Ms. Drabinski is an avowed Marxist lesbian. While we should all support Ms. Drabinski's personal right to express her identity and political beliefs, she should have exercised greater prudence and foresight before publishing them on Twitter. As the elected leader of ALA, she is undoubtedly aware her national office comes with a bully pulpit that can amplify her remarks nationwide. Regrettably and unintentionally, her remarks ignited a firestorm of protest including a campaign to defund ALA. Her words have been attached to justifications to defund ALA memberships at the state level in Arizona, Idaho, Illinois, Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina, Missouri, Montana and Wyoming. Moves to defund ALA have not been limited to the state level; indeed, they have served as a lightening rod in some national political discourse at least within some Republican controlled districts.

Ms. Drabinski's remarks are being used as a potent argument in the zero-sum mindset of those who wish to defund ALA. Today, the zero-sum mindset pervades both liberal and conservative ideological beliefs. It is described mostly in economic terms: gains by the wealthy few come at the expense of the poor (i.e., many). However, zero-sum thinking is also linked to the political landscape, where it allows both liberals and conservatives to maintain their ideological beliefs. Within the political arena of heated debates over policy decisions, it can be reinterpreted this way: a proposed policy benefits a select few at the expense of the many. In our current fractured political environment, a public or economic policy seldom benefits all citizens equally.

At the public meeting I attended, zero-sum thinking was on full display. A select few

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(Moms for Liberty), by defunding ALA, sought to diminish the perceived policy control of ALA over the county public library system. Their intent was to assert their political power and ideology over and against Ms. Drabinski's Marxist ideology, and over the objections of the majority of citizens who advocated for the status quo. For Moms for Liberty and the Sarasota County Commissioners who voted in favor of defunding ALA, it was a pyrrhic victory. While their zero-sum thinking rallied their own (diminutive band of) supporters and bolstered their conservative beliefs in shaping the current state of affairs within their local library system, their challenge to the status quo led to various undesirable outcomes for their library system and their community as a whole. Stripped of the benefits that come with institutional membership to ALA, the county library system must now pay more – and find alternative ways – to recruit new staff, train staff in best practices, and establish new means of professional networking. Moreover, this decision has undermined library staff's confidence in the County Commissioners, who sent a strong message that they are not committed to supporting their professional needs and care little for their ALA affiliated, professional credentials. It also irreparably harmed the national reputation of what was otherwise, by any measure, an exemplary public library system.

What then must we do? As advocates for libraries, we must resist adopting a zero-sum mindset. Rather, we should squarely look at any proposed policy and ask ourselves who stands to win and lose, would a policy benefit some at the expense of others, and would it benefit all citizens? It would likewise behoove state legislators and local leaders to avoid taking the side of policy changes that challenge the status quo as zero-sum. Instead, a better strategy for elected officials would be to seek possibilities for mutually beneficial agreements, embrace advantageous offers proposed by the other side, and always move in favor to reach win-win resolutions. If both sides resist zero-sum thinking, it will increase the likelihood of creating legislation and policies that will serve the public interest of all citizens and every library.

Andrew T. Sulavik, MLIS, ThD
Series Editor

Legislating Librarianship Redux

JILL A. WORK

ABSTRACT

School and public libraries in the United States, guided by long-standing principles in librarianship, as well as guidelines established by the American Library Association, support the freedom of information and ideas. Accordingly, most librarians and library boards believe local library collections should reflect their local populations, but also provide a balanced and expansive collection of materials that explore a variety of viewpoints, genres, cultures, and ideologies.

Traditionally, public libraries are run by a library manager/director, usually a credentialed librarian. A library board provides oversight for matters of policy. School libraries are generally managed by a school media specialist, with oversight by the principal and school board. Best practices in librarianship require that school and public libraries follow established, written collection development policies that include clearly defined procedures for book challenges.

In 2016, the article "Legislating Librarianship" (Work, 2016) examined several incidents in which elected officials sought to circumvent the authority of school and library boards and established and approved library policies in order to legislatively dictate different library policies and procedures; this included legislatively limiting collection options, line-item oversight of budget and expenditures, and politicizing Library of Congress subject heading determinations. The article queried whether these cases were "a set of isolated occurrences or a disturbing new trend in legislating librarianship" (Work, 2016).

This follow-up study focuses on how this trend has not only continued but escalated, with an emphasis on collection development policies for children and teens. While this list of cases is by no means comprehensive, it gives an indication of the increased scope of legislative impediments on intellectual freedom in school and public libraries.

Current trends in library collection censorship

The recent examples of legislating librarianship generally begin with extremely vocal groups of parents who enlist the support of elected officials who are sympathetic to the parents' complaints about school and public library children's collections. Historically, challenges for books for children and teens focused on mature themes, sex, violence, profanity, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ+) topics. The list of topics being found objectionable has expanded further. Books that legislators claim are promoting "Critical Race Theory" (CRT), such as themes of racial tension, equity, diversity, discrimination, and the history of American enslaved people, are also being legislatively

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challenged and banned. Law-makers have also progressed from looking to ban specific topics to also banning LGBTQ+ and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) authors. Bills have been considered – and in some states, passed – that could result in criminal prosecution of teachers and school and public librarians for disseminating materials that the state considers "harmful" or "pornographic."

Among the bills or mandates passed or being considered (see below for more details):

- Library collections must meet "community standards."
- State, county, and local politicians and political commissions can override local school boards and ban selected books in school libraries throughout the state.
- The state can mandate how teachers (including teacher-librarians) can discuss race and sex.
- A mayor can deny funding for a public library if books in the collection are morally objectionable to him and/or community members.
- Individual parents and parent groups are allowed greater access and authority to review books and to bring about the banning of books.
- Online databases must remove materials the state deems "harmful to minors" or be discontinued or fined.
- All access to digital eBook services and apps that include objectionable materials will be eliminated.
- Certain entire categories of library materials can be legislatively banned.
- Librarians can be criminally prosecuted for having books in the collection deemed to be "pornographic."
- Vendors can be criminally prosecuted for providing online materials deemed to be "pornographic."
- Book censorship can happen more readily when the book banners achieve political control of a town/county.

Those who seek the removal of books want more parental and governmental oversight of library collection development. They claim that the presence of the "objectional" books is "harmful to students." Objections range from the alleged presence of critical race theory to specific materials being deemed "pornographic," to a claim that some library collections lead to the "indoctrination" of students.

The defenders of the challenged books point out that many of the books are national award-winning books by critically acclaimed authors. Many of the challenged books in the collection reflect a "windows and mirrors" objective: books in a library should include "mirrors" that reflect the people who patronize that library, as well as "windows" so that library patrons can choose to view ideas, cultures, opinions, and lifestyles outside their own experiences (Bishop, 1990).

1. State requirements that library collections must meet "community standards."

Case study: *OKLAHOMA HOUSE BILL 3092*

Oklahoma HB 3092 seeks to codify a requirement that school library media programs adhere to "community standards" when "acquiring materials, resources, and equipment" (Oklahoma State Legislature, 2022, HB 3092).

Text of the bill

"As school library media center resources are finite, the library media program shall be reflective of the community standards for the population the library media center serves when acquiring an age-appropriate collection of print materials, nonprint materials, multimedia resources, equipment, and supplies adequate in quality and quantity to meet the needs of students in all areas of the school library media program" (Oklahoma Legislature, 2022, HB 3092).

Justifications for the bill

The bill was initiated in response to parent complaints to the Bristol Board of Education, which resulted in the vetting of approximately 25,000 books and the banning of eight books (Gore, 2022). This is "one of several bills" considered to regulate school library content that some community members find problematic. Co-author of the bill House Speaker Pro Tem Kyle Hilbert claims the bill is about "empowering the local elected school boards to make the decisions that are best for their local school district" (McDonnell, 2022).

Objections to the bill

Policy Director Cindy Nguyen of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Oklahoma is concerned about the bill's "potential chilling effect on speech" (McDonnell, 2022). She worries that teachers and librarians will not feel free to discuss real-world teen and children's issues such as racism and homophobia (McDonnell, 2022).

Community response

Representative John Waldron explained that he thought the bill was a good compromise:

> "You could ask why would this be necessary, should the legislature be involved. But the truth is, the legislature had several proposals regarding libraries. Many of them would have been damaging to our library system. So, I think a coalition of people on both sides of the aisle stood up in support of our libraries by merely codifying the statutes as they exist" (McDonnell, 2022).

The Oklahoma Library Association remained neutral on the bill but pointed out that libraries already have policies in place which allow parents or other community members to object to library materials and to have those objections addressed (Gore, 2022).

Status of the bill

Signed into law April 29, 2022, (LegiScan OK, 2022, HB 3092,) with an effective date of November 1, 2022 (FastDemocracy, 2022).

Similar case

OKLAHOMA SENATE BILL 1654

This bill would prohibit school libraries from having books in their collections that deal with sexuality or gender, including books that refer to "non-procreative sex" (Oklahoma State Legislature, 2022, SB 1654).

Status of the bill

Died in committee, February 8, 2022 (LegiScan, OK, 2022, SB 1654).

2. Legislation that allows state, county, and local politicians and political commissions to override local school boards and ban selected books in school libraries throughout the state.

Case study: FLORIDA HOUSE BILL 7

Legislation described as "Individual Freedom" or the "Stop WOKE Act" forbids "any teaching that could make students feel they bear personal responsibility for historic wrongs because of their race, color, sex, or national origin" (Delgado, 2022). The bill is also designed to "give employees the ability to file discrimination claims against an employer [that requires] engaging in trainings or discussions about Black history, LGBTQ+ issues, and other concepts of injustice and discrimination" (Luneau, 2022).

Text of the bill

"Individual Freedom; Provides that subjecting individuals to specified concepts under certain circumstances constitutes discrimination based on race, color, sex, or national origin; revising requirements for required instruction on the history of African Americans; requiring the department to prepare and offer certain standards and curriculum; authorizing the department to seek input from a specified organization for certain purposes; prohibits instructional materials reviewers from recommending instructional materials that contain any matter that contradicts certain principles; requires DOE (Department of Education) to review school district professional development systems for compliance with certain provisions of law" (The Florida Senate, 2022, CS/HB7).

In a last minute unvetted addition to the bill, an amendment was added stipulating that state universities found to be guilty of breaking this law could lose state funding for the next fiscal year. Any appeals to such decisions would be considered a budget question and could be referred to the legislature for resolution rather than to the courts (Brown, D., 2022, March 14).

Justifications for the bill

The bill was proposed in response to assertions by Governor Ron DeSantis and others that activities like racial sensitivity training and teaching that implies or describes systemic racism in America are both inherently racist activities and examples of being "woke" and promoting "critical race theory."The bill is intended "to give businesses, employees, children and families tools to stand up against discrimination and woke indoctrination" (The Office of Governor Ron DeSantis, 2022, HB 7).

DeSantis explained, "In Florida, we will not let the far-left woke agenda take over our schools and workplaces" (The Office of Governor Ron DeSantis, 2022, April 22).

Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez added, "We will always fight to protect our children and parents from this Marxist-inspired curriculum" (The Office of Governor Ron DeSantis, 2022, April 22).

Objections to the bill

The bill prohibits "certain kinds of diversity, equity, and inclusion training" (National Law Review, 2022), which is part of training that helps prevent both overt and accidental discriminatory behaviors in the workplace.

According to Cathryn M. Oakley, State Legislative Director and Senior Counsel at the Human Rights Campaign, the bill is a setback to civil rights.

> "This bill is a thinly veiled political attempt to attack marginalized communities. Let's be clear – the negative consequences of the 'Stop WOKE Act' will…hurt the LGBTQ+ community, people of color, and women. Every historically marginalized population will be impacted by this legislation" (Luneau, 2022).

State Representative Carlos Guillermo Smith explained that this added language gave complainants the opportunity to avoid the court system.

> "…if you have a complaint, if you believe that a higher education institution, for example, taught history or taught racism in a way that made you feel uncomfortable, in violation of the Stop WOKE Act…a political committee of the Florida Legislature…will be the judge, jury, and executioner on all violations of House Bill 7" (Brown, I., 2022, March 14).

Objectors to the bill agree that the bill is politically motivated action that rolls back progress gains in equity for marginalized communities while dismissing the benefits of diversity training programs in learning institutions and workplaces.

Status of the bill

Signed into law April 22, 2022, with an effective date of July 1, 2022 (The Florida Senate, 2022, HB7).

Further action

A lawsuit has been brought against this law by a higher education student and educators, Pernell vs. Florida Board of Governors, claiming a violation of the First and Fourteenth amendment. A judge agreed:

> "The law officially bans professors from expressing disfavored viewpoints in university classrooms while permitting unfettered expression of the opposite viewpoints. Defendants argue that, under this Act, professors enjoy 'academic freedom' so long as they express only those viewpoints of which the State approves. This is positively dystopian. It should go without saying that '[i]f liberty means anything at all it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.'" (Legal Defense Fund, 2022).

An injunction was issued by the judge to "block the Board of Governors from enforcing the law against public higher education institutions in Florida." Another injunction prohibits subjecting Florida employers to the limits of the law. The injunctions do not change the application of the law to K-12 classrooms (Legal Defense Fund, 2022).

Similar cases

ARKANSAS SENATE BILL 66

This bill is designed to protect minors from exposure to "harmful materials," and bars distribution of materials that the average person applying community standards would object to as appealing or pandering to "prurient interests" by children. Criminal penalties can be assessed against internet distributions of such materials, with liability for newspaper/radio personnel and publishers and distributors.

Status of the bill

Enacted April 11, 2023 (Arkansas State Legislature, 2023, April 26).

NORTH DAKOTA HOUSE BILL 1205

This legislation establishes certain library collection policies, including a prohibition of "sexually explicit materials" unsuitable for minors, and a process for challenging books.

Status of the bill

Enacted April 26, 2023 (68th Legislative Assembly, 2023, April 26).

TENNESSEE HOUSE BILL 2666/SENATE BILL 2247

If a book removal request is denied by local book challenge procedures, this bill allows complainants to appeal to the state textbook commission, and it grants veto power to the state commission over local school board decisions (Tennessee General Assembly, 2022, SB 2247).

Status of the bill

Signed into law June 3, 2022, with an effective date of July 1, 2022 (Tennessee General Assembly, 2022, SB 2247).

3. State mandates on how teachers (including teacher-librarians) can discuss race and sex.

Case study: MICHIGAN SENATE BILL 460

The bill is designed to prohibit any teachings that might be construed as "critical race theory," including The 1619 Project, and references to systemic racism in the country's history, politics, laws, and America's founding documents.

Description of the bill

The bill prohibits schools from teaching critical race theory or The 1619 Project, teaching that the United States is a fundamentally racist country, or characterizing the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence as fundamentally racist documents (Senate Bill No. 460, 2021).

Justifications for the bill

Senator Lana Theis introduced the bill "To prohibit Michigan public schools from instructing children on 'critical race theory,' 'the 1619 project,' or other specified 'anti-American and racist theories.'" She is opposed to any inference that "an individual of a particular race is consciously or unconsciously 'inherently racist or oppressive'" (MichiganVotes.Org, 2021). She claimed, "Critical race theory threatens Michigan's K-12 students with a dangerous false narrative about our country and its place in the world." She explained that schools should be teaching "this nation's founding principles of individual freedom, liberty and equality" (MI Senate GOP, n.d.).

Objections to the bill

The state board of education passed a resolution opposing the bill. Board member Pamela Pugh stated, "Teachers have the right and responsibility to teach the multifaceted and complex history including the history of race, racism and other biases, which are inextricably connected to the Constitutional and statutory history in our country" (13 On Your Side, 2022).

A joint resolution was posed by several state teachers' associations, stating that "[We] stand united in our opposition to Senate Bill 460 and House Bill 5097." They went on to state that the bill impedes teacher's academic freedoms and would "restrict allowing students to wrestle with complicated truths of our country's history, including systematic oppression and discrimination" (Michigan Council for the Social Studies, 2022).

Status of the bill

Died in committee, 2021 (LegiScan, MI, 2021).

Further actions

In January of 2022, the State Board of Education worked to counter the anti-"CRT" bills. They passed a resolution on "teaching comprehensive history," introduced by Democrat Pamela Pugh. It states that "teachers have the right and responsibility to teach the multifaceted and complex history including the history of race, racism and other biases, which are inextricably connected to the constitutional and statutory history in our country" (Donahue, 2022).

In June of 2022, a GOP-led Senate Committee proposed a bill with "similar ideas to Senate Bill 460." The bill, HB 5097, would "restrict what can be taught about race and forbid teaching that 'individuals bear collective guilt for historical wrongs committed by their race or gender.'"

Status of the bill

Died in committee, 2022 (Lohman, 2022).

Case study: TEXAS HOUSE BILL 3979

Texas House Bill 3979 targets alleged teaching of "critical race theory." The bill imposes limits on curriculum related to the teaching of racism and race relations in the U.S., as well as discussions that suggest that racism is systemic in U.S. history, U.S. politics, U.S. law, and U.S. founding documents.

As a companion action to the bill, Texas Governor Greg Abbott and Texas Representative Matt Krause compiled and distributed a list of some 850 books with approaches to race, sexuality, and history which might "make students feel discomfort" (Chappell, 2021). The list was distributed to school districts with a request to reply with a list of these books that were in their collections and how much money was spent on them.

Description of the bill

Teachers cannot be compelled to discuss current events or currently controversial issues of public policy, but if they do, they should present opposing viewpoints without bias, and may not give assignments that include political advocacy.

- Teachers may not be required to attend diversity training.
- A student may not be blamed for historical actions by those of his or her race or gender.
- Students should not be made to feel "discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race or sex" (HB no. 3979, 2021).

Justifications for the bill

State Representative Steve Toth's legislation says, "a teacher cannot 'require or make part of a course' a series of race-related concepts, including the ideas that 'one race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex,' or that someone is 'inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive' based on their race or sex.'" He claims the bill "is about teaching racial harmony by telling the truth that we are all equal, both in God's eyes and our founding documents" (Svitek, 2021).

Objections to the bill

Democratic legislators took issue with parts of the bill that would "limit discussion of current events in the classroom, prohibit private funding for social studies courses," and prevent teachers from student assignments that involve "working with an organization involved in legislative lobbying or political activism" (Svitek, 2021). The Intercultural

Development Research Association (IDRA) stated that the bill severely limits "the civic development of students as well as the ability of teachers and school leaders to guide student development in civic spheres" (IDRA, 2022).

More than 70 businesses and civic groups from throughout Texas voiced objections to the bill, including the Austin and Dallas independent school districts and former State Historian of Texas Jesús F. de la Teja (Marshall and Teja, 2021).

In response to the companion action inferring that the 850 books were "inappropriate," Ovidia Molina, the president of the Texas State Teachers Association, described this action as "political overreach into the classroom," a "witch hunt," and "possibly illegal" (Chappell, 2021).

Status of the bill

Signed into law June 15, 2021, with an effective date of September 1, 2021 (LegiScan, TX, 2021).

Community response

In response to the list distributed by Representative Krauss, officials from the Northeast Independent School District (NEISD) of San Antonio pulled 432 books from library shelves, using the list as a guide. They permanently removed more than 100 of the books from school libraries, reviewed and returned 311 books to library shelves, moved 11 books to libraries for older students, and removed 110 books to be replaced with newer editions or better-reviewed books on similar topics. The school board was informed of the actions after the fact. Amy Senia, an NEISD alumna and civil rights attorney, noted that the list targeted "certain groups of people," particularly the LGBTQ+ community. Senia spoke with a student who wanted the district to "Stop trying to get rid of us. I'm not a freak. Don't erase me" (Crum, 2022).

The district added parental access to their children's library book checkout histories, an option to block their children from access to books suited for an older audience, and the right to participate in committee reviews of challenged books. Additionally, parents can participate in campus and districtwide committees to review books that have been challenged for removal (Crum, 2022).

The list and other book censorship issues have resulted in job loss and community harassment for Texas librarians who resist book banning without due process. Public librarian Suzette Baker's boss asked her to hide a book on critical race theory behind the counter. She ignored the directive and complained to the administrators that the library was being censored. It became harder for her to get approval to order new books and to add new and donated books to the shelves. Eventually, Baker was fired "for insubordination, creating a disturbance and failure to follow instructions" (Park, 2022).

Other Texas public and school librarians have faced repercussions from administrators, as well as social media backlash, when they resisted or refused to remove specified books from the shelves without going through a book challenge process. In Keller, local social media accounts included blatant comments about school librarians being "heretical" and portrayed them as pedophile "groomers" who order pornographic books. There was even a suggestion that the community should "pass the millstones" (Park, 2022), a Biblical reference to execution by drowning.

A librarian in Katy Independent School District worries that librarians will soon only be able to fill shelves with books on pre-approved lists (Park, 2022).

A librarian at Round Rock Independent School District was in tears when she went to Ami

Uselman, the director of library services for the district; she worried about what her church would think about social media accounts calling librarians groomers. Another quit. Uselman said that parents are coming to school libraries to seek records or "grill" librarians, but choose not to use the process in place by making a formal book challenge (Park, 2022).

Similar cases

FLORIDA HOUSE BILL 1069, requires revisions to health and sex education curriculum

In this bill Florida defines "sex," regulates language on gender identity, and revises health curriculum to meet state standards. Among other provisions, this bill defines "sex" for Florida's Early Learning code, regulates pronoun and title usage, revises reproductive health curriculum, and holds school board accountable for content of health curriculum.

Status of the bill: Enacted May 18, 2023 (Bill track 50, 2023, May 18).

IDAHO HOUSE BILL 377

This bill states that instruction in critical race theory can "exacerbate and inflame divisions on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, religion, color, national origin, or other criteria in ways contrary to the unity of the nation and the well-being of the state of Idaho and its citizens" (House Bill No. 377, 2021). The bill will prohibit teaching "CRT" and any expenditures that would promote its teaching and dissemination. Supporters of the bill describe social justice topics, including CRT, as "garbage" and say such topics display an "anti-American agenda" (Asmelash, 2021).

Status of the bill

Signed into law, immediately effective, on April 28, 2021 (Idaho Legislature, 2021).

IOWA HOUSE BILL SF496, prohibits instructions on gender identity and sexual orientation

Among the provisions in this bill is a prohibition of school instruction related to gender identity and sexual orientation.

Status of the bill: Enacted May 26, 2023 (Bill track 50, 2023, May 26).

Drag show attendance by minors is prohibited in Montana by HB 359

This bill defines drag shows as "sexually-oriented performances," and consequently bans them from occurring where minors are present, such as public libraries and schools, as well as banning minors from attending such events at any venue. Venues allowing minors at such performances can be find thousands of dollars and potentially have their business permits revoked.

Status of the bill: Enacted May 23, 2023 (Bill track 50, 2023, May 23).

LOUISIANA HOUSE BILL 1014, restricts how teachers can teach about racism in the U.S.

This bill was designed to prohibit any teaching that might be labeled as CRT, and to make it "illegal for schools to teach that people of any race or national origin are still affected by racism or oppression" (Canicosa, 2022, May 17). It is one of several bills proposed by Louisiana State Representative Garafalo to limit how teachers can teach politicized topics.

Status of the bill: The Louisiana House Education Committee rejected the bill.

Under pressure from the House Black Caucus, Garafalo was ousted as Education Committee Chair. After being forced to step down, Garafalo distributed a press release

entitled, "Republican Speaker chooses Black Democrats over fellow Republican Chairman" (Canicosa, 2022, May 18).

NORTH DAKOTA SENATE BILL 2247

This bill specifically applies to higher education, and prohibits race or sex "scapegoating;" provisions include refraining from making "an individual…feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or another form of psychological distress solely because of the individual's race or sex." The bill disallows instruction that indicates the state or federal government is fundamentally racist.

Status of the bill

Enacted April 24, 2023 (68th Legislative Assembly, 2023, April 24).

OKLAHOMA HOUSE BILL 1775

This bill stipulates that higher education students "will not be compelled to engage in any form of gender or sexual diversity training or counseling, nor be made to feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race or sex. There can be no instruction that academic or societal success involves racial or sexual discrimination rather than individual merit and hard work" (HB 1775, 2021).

Status of the bill

Signed into law, May 7, 2021 (LegiScan, OK, 2021), with an effective date of July 1, 2021 (Oklahoma State Legislature, 2021).

Further actions

In October 2021, a group of educators and students, represented by Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law, filed suit on the basis of racial discrimination and a claim that the law violates the First and Fourteenth Amendments (Crawford, 2021).

State officials, including the Oklahoma Attorney General and the State Board of Education, sought to dismiss the group's lawsuit in February 2023. A brief was immediately filed by legal representatives for the plaintiffs that included Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and the ACLU, objecting to the state's attempts to "stall" the lawsuit (Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, 2023).

Status of the lawsuit

The plaintiffs' case is on a "waiting" list and has yet to be heard by a judge, as of August, 2023 (King, 2023).

TENNESSEE HOUSE BILL 580

This is a bill that covers a broad cross-section of educational policies. Of concern are two seemingly contradictory sections. According to one section, "districts and schools shall not permit the usage of curriculum or supplemental instructional materials that include or promote a host of important social and historical concepts, including racism, sexism, the violent overthrow of the United States government, and other forms of oppression or division based on a number of identities." However, another section "permits instruction that discusses 'history of an ethnic group,' 'the impartial discussion of controversial aspects of history,' and "'the impartial discussion on the historical oppression of a particular group of people'" (The Education Trust, 2021).

Status of the bill

Signed into law, immediately effective, on May 25, 2021 (Tennessee General Assembly, 2021, HB 0580).

4. Ability of a mayor to deny funding for a public library over concerns regarding a display of LGBTQ+ books.

Case study: *PUBLIC LIBRARY BUDGET IN RIDGELAND, MISSISSIPPI*

Although the city's Board of Aldermen in Ridgeland, Mississippi, approved the public library's $110,000 budget, Mayor Gene McGee insisted he would withhold the funds until the library addressed issues regarding books on display and in the library's collection.

Justifications for the action

After complaints about a January LGBTQ+ display at the library, Mayor McGee refused to release library funding. The mayor claimed he wanted the library to "respond to sexual content" in the library's collection and later claimed the issue was "a political display." Library Director Tonja Johnson claimed that the mayor said he wanted "homosexual material" removed from the library. "His reasoning that he gave was that, as a Christian, he could not support that, and that he would not release funding until we remove the material" (Hunter, 2022). The mayor denied saying that.

At a contentious Board of Aldermen meeting in February 2022, the focus of the complaints was on LGBTQ+ content in library materials. In public comments, attorney Cal Wells explained his reaction to a display of new books that had numerous books with LGBTQ+ themes. "I was shocked…all I saw was books that had one agenda. One agenda!" (Judin, 2022, February 21).

Objections to the action

Alderman Ken Heard claimed that the mayor lacked the authority to unilaterally deny funds to the library. Library Director Johnson said, "We do not exclude an item based solely on its content or subject matter … It's up to each of us to decide what is best for our own children, our own families. It's by providing a diverse collection with different viewpoints and perspectives that we empower families to make choices …When you take that right away from one of us, you take it away from all of us" (Judin, 2022, February 21).

Community response

The Friends of the Library, in conjunction with EveryLibrary Institute, spearheaded a crowd-funding effort that raised half of the library's annual budget as a stopgap measure while the aldermen, mayor, and library board continued to negotiate the funding contract for more than three months (Judin, 2022, February 8).

Resolution

In March 2022, the library offered a proposal to renew their standing contract with the city with virtually no change. They provided a "memorandum of understanding" that they would provide the aldermen with an annual comprehensive list of books and materials challenges, along with the resolution to each challenge. The memorandum also states that this is strictly for informational purposes, and that the determinations made by the Reconsideration Committee or the Madison County Public Library System Board of Trustees will be final and not subject to the city's oversight. By mid-April the city agreed to the revised contract and memorandum of understanding, and the funding was fully restored

(EveryLibrary, 2022).

5. Parental oversight of local and school library collections.

Case Study: FLORIDA HOUSE BILL 1467

This bill allows parents the opportunity to be part of the review process for the consideration of elementary instructional materials. The intention is to make it easier for parents to have "questionable materials" removed from school libraries, even without parental consensus.

Description of the bill's relevant objectives

The bill mandates that certain meetings relating to instructional materials be open to the public and opens membership of the instructional materials committees to include some parents. Specific information on instructional materials at elementary schools is required to be published on their websites. The specified process of developing library media center collections stipulates that certain requirements are met, and must include training for all involved. The principal is charged with overseeing compliance with specified procedures in this process (The Florida Senate, 2022, CS/HB 1467).

Justifications for the bill

Governor DeSantis wants to offer more parental oversight over children's reading and studying. He claims that the law will allow parents to review and object to materials that they find to "deviate from state standards or just to be inappropriate." He explains that the law includes a requirement to include searchable lists of elementary school materials on school websites. School boards would be required to report any parent/community objections to materials to the Department of Education, which will distribute a list of "materials that were removed or discontinued as a result of an objection and disseminate the list to school districts for consideration in their selection procedures" (Brown, D., 2022, March 25).

Objections to the bill

Jonathan Friedman, director of PEN America's Free Expression and Education program states that a purpose of the bill is to "intimidate teachers from using any books or materials that might even be remotely controversial." He expressed concern that publishing lists of books banned in one district might cause other districts to pre-emptively ban the same books to avoid challenges. He also pointed out that the school requirements in the bill would add a "costly and time-consuming" administrative burden to schools (PEN America, 2022).

The National Coalition Against Censorship expressed deep concerns about this bill, as well as "The Stop Woke Act," saying that these bills diminish the ability of students to access information and that such bills are likely to cause a dramatic increase in censorship in Florida's public schools (National Coalition Against Censorship, n.d.).

Status of the bill

Signed into law March 25, 2022, with an effective date of July 1, 2022 (The Florida Senate, 2022, HB 1467).

Similar cases

ARIZONA HOUSE BILL 2439

This bill establishes "parental review for books that are approved for school libraries,

requiring schools to post the list of newly purchased books on their websites for at least 60 days after approval" (Margula, 2022).

Status of the bill

Signed into law April 29, 2022 (LegiScan, AZ, 2022).

MISSOURI HOUSE BILL 2044

This bill, dubbed the "Parental Oversight of Public Libraries Act," "cuts off state aid to any public library that allows minors to access 'age-inappropriate sexual materials.'" Public libraries will be required to establish a "parental library review board," made up of five members elected by a majority of voters in a local meeting called for that purpose; library employees are ineligible from serving on the board (Kaur, 2020).

Status of the bill

Died in committee, 2020 (LegiScan, MO, 2020).

VIRGINIA HOUSE BILL 1379

Virginia state Delegate Tim Anderson proposed a bill that requires "school principals or their designee to electronically catalog all printed and audiovisual materials in school libraries, identify whether the item contains graphic sexual content, and make the catalog available to parents." This bill also includes a provision for an "opt-out" system in which parents can restrict their child's access to specified books. The chair of the public education sub-committee, state senator Ghazala Hashmi, questioned why library staff should have the burden of reviewing and labeling all the library materials instead of "giving the parents the responsibility of monitoring what their children are encountering." State senator Bill DeSteph wants procedures in place that will "protect our children's innocence as long as humanly possible." School library staff point out that school libraries already have procedures that give parents "significant opportunity" to know and object to the books in the libraries. (Cline, 2023).

Status of the bill

Passed the House, "passed by indefinitely" in the Senate (LIS, 2023).

UTAH HOUSE BILL 0465

This act provides for transparency for parents for school library circulation. The act requires that education agencies that provide materials to school libraries must also "provide an online platform that allows a parent to view information regarding materials the parent's child borrows from the school library."

Status of the bill

Enacted, March 17, 2023 (Utah State Legislature, 2023).

6. An edict by the state to shut down a database used statewide due to the presence of materials deemed "harmful to minors."

MISSISSIPPI HOUSE BILL 1315

The act regulates exposure to "pornographic media" by children, specifically digital and online resources used in K-12 schools. Vendors providing such resources must verify that they will comply with the stated regulation. This includes materials that constitute child

pornography or that depict any kind of sexual activities.

Status of the bill

Enacted, March 31, 2023 (Bill track 50, 2023, March 31).

NEBRASKA LEGISLATIVE BILL 1213

This bill requires that digital content accessed by students excludes any content that is deemed obscene "as defined by state law." The original bill held schools, school districts, and the Nebraska Library Commission liable, but an amendment reassigns liability to the vendors that produce and provide the databases. Under the law, a parent or guardian of a minor can bring a civil action against the database vendor, with potential damages up of to $10,000 per violation. (Unicameral Update, 2022).

Status of the bill

Indefinitely postponed as of April 20, 2022 (Nebraska Legislature, 2022).

OKLAHOMA HOUSE BILL 3702

This bill prohibits access—digital and nondigital—to pornographic materials by students through library databases. All publicly funded schools are required to obtain verification of compliance with this ruling from database vendors they wish to use. "Contractors failing to comply would face loss of payment and be considered in breach of contract." Employees at state-funded institutions will "not be exempt from state law which prohibits indecent exposure to obscene material or child pornography as defined in state statute" (McCaslin, 2022).

Status of the bill

Signed into law, May 18, 2022 (LegiScan OK, 2022, HB3702).

7. An edict by the state to shut down an eBook service used statewide due to the presence of materials "harmful to minors."

FLORIDA: BREVARD COUNTY SCHOOLS

The new Florida law HB 1467 requires "curriculum transparency," and requires that books children are reading have "proper vetting" (The Office of Governor Ron DeSantis, 2022, March 25). EPIC is a free app that contains more than 40,000 eBook titles for students, selected and vetted by the vendor. In an effort to comply with the law, Brevard County School District felt compelled to discontinue the use of EPIC." (The Office of Governor Ron DeSantis, 2022, March 25).

Resolution

The EPIC app remains banned.

TENNESSEE:WILLIAMSON COUNTY SCHOOLS

After a parent objection to a book on the EPIC book app depicting a same sex marriage, the school reviewed the app, but did not find any age-inappropriate materials. They also investigated and ascertained that the school's internet filters were working properly. The district now allows parents the options of having EPIC removed from their child's Chromebook dashboard (Bornar, 2022).

Resolution

The EPIC app was reinstated, with the option for parental opt-out.

TEXAS: LLANO PUBLIC LIBRARY

County officials wanted to ban two books on the OverDrive eBook/audiobook app. OverDrive offers parental controls, but there is no mechanism to selectively delete or prohibit access to specific OverDrive materials for all users. This led the Llano County commissioners to suspend the use of OverDrive altogether.

As a result, a group of library cardholders filed a federal lawsuit in April 2022 against the county judge, county commissioners, and library officials for violating their First Amendment rights by denying access to all the eBooks in the app because the county government deemed a handful of books to be "pornographic." The lawsuit claims that the books were not pornographic and that the officials were targeting books that conflicted with their personal political and religious views (Hernandez, 2022). The judge in the case claimed the suspension of OverDrive was pending review of the service by the Llano County Commissioner's Court (Thompson, 2022). In May, plaintiffs sought a federal injunction to "restore book access" (Reynolds, 2022). County officials requested dismissal of the lawsuit on June 9, claiming that First Amendment rights were not infringed upon because "library selections count as government speech that can be regulated more stringently than other speech" (Mitchell, 2022, June 9).

Status of the case

Awaiting judicial resolution; OverDrive was discontinued and replaced with the app Biblioteca (Cooley, 2022).

8. Selective bans of certain categories of books in libraries.

TEXAS HOUSE BILL 900

Texas House Bill 900 was passed in June, requiring school library materials vendors, such as publishers and booksellers, to label any book containing "sexually explicit materials;" such materials are banned from being sold to public schools, and books meeting the criteria are to be removed from collections. The Texas Education Agency has oversight over those ratings. Any vendors who do not comply will be prohibited from selling any books to Texas public schools (Dey & Lopez, 2023).

In July, a coalition of authors, booksellers, and publishers responded with a lawsuit against the state of Texas over the law. The coalition claims that the law violates the First Amendment by compelling "plaintiffs to express the government's views, even if they do not agree," in violation of the First Amendment's free speech protections. The plaintiffs also describe as "unconstitutionally vague" the law's description of what constitutes "explicit" materials (Ax, 2023). Status of the bill: The law was poised to go into effect September 1, 2023, but U.S. District Judge Alan Albright issued a preliminary injunction to prevent the law from taking effect (Marshall, 2023). After additional hearings, Judge Albright struck down the law as unconstitutional (Bingamon, 2023).

9. State and federal criminal liability for librarians with collections containing "pornographic" materials.

ARKANSAS SENATE BILL 81

This bill deals primarily with review procedures for challenging library materials, removes exemption from prosecution for school and library employees, and allows parents to view library records of their minor children. Materials found to be obscene can result in misdemeanor and felony convictions for the person knowingly possessing and distributing such materials.

Status of the bill

Enacted April 4, 2023 (Bill track 50, 2023, April 4).

IDAHO HOUSE BILL 666

This bill allows librarians to be criminally charged with "disseminating material that is harmful to minors" if they check out "harmful" materials to children (Corbin, 2022). The existing law has exemptions from criminal prosecution for librarians, schools, museums, and colleges; this revision removes those exemptions.

Status of the bill

Died in committee, March 8, 2022 (LegiScan ID, 2022).

INDIANA SENATE BILL 17

Schools and certain public libraries will no longer be eligible for a "specified defense" against prosecution for "the dissemination of material harmful to minors" (Indiana General Assembly, 2022).

Status of the bill

Died in committee (LegiScan, IN, 2022).

IOWA HOUSE FILE 2176

This bill makes it illegal for a person affiliated with a public school or public library to knowingly spread "material the person knows or reasonably should know, is obscene or harmful to minors." Consequences can include prosecution and civil fines; the penalty would be an aggravated misdemeanor, upgraded to a class D felony if the person was previously guilty of the same offense (Drury, 2022).

Status of the bill

Died in committee (LegiScan, IA, 2022).

TENNESSEE SENATE BILL 1944

This bill removes the educational exemption and allow for criminal prosecution of school librarians for providing materials that are determined to be pornographic or obscene (Aldrich, 2022). During public comments, a correlation was made between librarians and sexual predators.

Status of bill

Died in chamber (LegiScan, TN, 2022).

GILLETTE, WYOMING PUBLIC LIBRARY

Parental objections over library books related to sex and LGBTQ+ themes resulted in prosecutors in Gillette, Wyoming, considering "filing criminal charges against the staff at a

local public library for allegedly distributing obscene material to minors" (Jackson, 2021)

Resolution

The county attorney declined to press charges, finding that the books did not run afoul of existing Wyoming laws, and there was no "probable cause" (Gruver, 2021).

10. Allows for state and federal investigations and civil penalties for vendors who provide or distribute online "pornographic" materials to minors.

LOUISIANA HOUSE BILL 77

This bill requires age verifications by publishers and distributors of online media materials (excluding bona fide news-gathering organizations) that can be deemed "harmful to minors." Violations will be investigated by the attorney general, with the potential for civil penalties that include a fine of up to $5000 per day of violation, plus recovery of all costs assorted with the investigation and subsequent legal action.

Status of the bill

Enacted June 8, 2023 (Bill track 50, 2023, June 8).

SB2346 imposes online vendor liability for distributing materials "harmful to minors"

This legislation in Mississippi establishes liability for any vendor or other entity that distributes materials "harmful to minors" on the internet without age verification. The onus is put on the vendors/sites to have a functioning age verification system.

Status of the bill: Enacted April 18, 2023 (Bill track 50, 2023, April 18).

11. Book challenge leading to the politization of a censorship campaign and becomes intertwined with county-wide community political upheaval.

Case study: TEXAS, HOOD COUNTY

An escalating library censorship campaign included calling the cops, bullying a public librarian, countermanding school library book challenge policies, and disbanding a public library advisory committee. The school district book bans led to a federal probe while the censorship campaign led to a local political overhaul in which moderate conservatives were replaced with ultra-rightwing ideologists.

A censorship crusade

The campaign to remove materials from the Hood County Library, and eventually the local Granville Independent School District (Granville ISD), began in 2015, and is still ongoing.

In 2015, community member and mom Melanie Graft was appalled to find two LGBT+ themed picture books in the children's section of the public library. Librarian Courtney Kincaid agreed to move one book to the adult section, while the other remained in the children's section. Graft and other opponents of books "…that foisted inappropriate themes on unsuspecting children" (Schwartz, 2022) appealed to the Hood County Commissioners Court, the political body responsible for appointing library board members. The court supported the librarian's actions on First Amendment grounds (Schwartz, 2022).

At the same time politically far-right community members lost the battle on censoring books with LGBTQ+ themes, they were also grappling with the recent legalization of same-

sex marriage by the U.S. Supreme Court, and the subsequent forced local county compliance. The resulting outrage fueled a political movement to put decision-makers in place that would supplant existing Republicans with far-right ideologists.

The far-right activists also began a harassment campaign against Kincaid. They posted someone at the circulation desk to watch the librarian every day when she was working, and she was followed any time she left the library for lunch or errands. By the end of 2015, she had quit. Graft continued to harass Kincaid after the librarian secured a job in another town (Schwartz, 2022).

Over the next seven years, the far-rightwing coalition won seats on the County Commissioners Court and the library advisory board, displacing the more traditional Republicans. In 2017, ultra-rightwing activist Dave Eagle won a position on the County Commissioners Court. His credentials included a leadership role in eliminating the independent elections administrator position by transferring election duties to a partisan county clerk (Schwartz, 2022). In 2019, the Hood County Republican Party issued a formal resolution calling for the library advisory board to be disbanded, claiming that it failed to reflect the "moral character" of the community (Schwartz, 2022).

Meanwhile, Graft became involved in local politics, serving on the local library advisory board and as a Republican Party precinct chair. In the fall of 2021, Graft and like-minded Courtney Gore, a co-host of a local ultra-rightwing internet talk show, won school board seats for Granbury ISD by promising to fight "indoctrination," "LGBT ideology," and "critical race theory" (Schwartz, 2022).

When Texas state Representative Matt Krause published a list of books in the fall of 2021 deemed "inappropriate" for children, the Granbury ISD responded in January 2022 by pulling 131 books from school library shelves for review. About 73% of the books contained "LGBTQ characters or themes" (Schwartz, 2022). School superintendent Jeremy Glenn supported the purge on religious grounds. He also agreed with the commission's decision to bypass the review committee and remove any books deemed "vulgar" or "unsuitable" by the administration or the school board (Schwartz, 2022).

Amid public furor, including student protests, the library's review committee examined and voted to return most of the books to school library shelves. Two of the committee members were outvoted. They subsequently reported the school to local law enforcement authorities for making "pornography" available to minors. The constable's office initiated an investigation (Gilbert, 2022).

Monica Brown, one of the two who complained to the constable's office, spoke at an early board meeting on the topic. She complained that the library review committee had too many librarians on it, and instead needed "people of good moral standards." She suggested her pastor (Carter, 2022).

One of the public opponents to Brown's actions is her estranged son, Weston Brown, who is gay. He travelled from San Diego to Granbury to speak at the school board meeting on behalf of LGBTQ+ students:

> "I would have given anything to read a book [with a] character that felt the feelings I felt, to ask the questions I couldn't ask, and learn the lessons that I needed to learn … I'm here today to implore you to listen to librarians, educators, and students, not those speaking from a religious perspective or at the bidding of a political group" (Hall, 2023).

Other residents agreed. High school senior Lou Whiting, who identifies as non-binary,

worried that eliminating representation was only the first step in persecuting LGBTQ+ individuals, claiming, "They're trying to erase us" (Hall, 2023).

Former school board trustee and parent of a high school senior, Christopher Tackett, spoke out against the bans at a January 2022 school board meeting. He described the ban:

> "It's part of a larger movement to take the levers of power on school boards, city councils, county commissioners…to be able to impose a very specific ideology into that. And in most cases, it's connected to religion—the term that is used broadly is Christian nationalism" (Hall, 2023).

At the meeting, the board voted unanimously to revise the rules to permit them to "remove materials because they are pervasively vulgar or based solely upon the educational suitability of the resource in question" (Hall, 2023).

Two months later, it became obvious that the criteria for banning books was broader than just "pervasively vulgar" books. The superintendent's comment to school librarians had been secretly recorded, and the verified recordings led to a federal probe into the matter for "violating a federal law that prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender." The superintendent's comments included:

> "Let's just call it what it is. I'm cutting to the chase on a lot of this. It's the transgender, LGBTQ, and the sex, sexuality in books….I'm going to take it a step further with you … I acknowledge that there are men that think they're women and there are women that think they're men…I don't have any issues with what people want to believe, but there's no place for it in our libraries" (Hall, 2023).

The federal investigation is ongoing.

On August 2, 2023, school board trustee Karen Lowery was attending an event in the high school cafeteria and gained entrance into the library – without prior permission – to "examine books on the shelves."This was in direct violation of Board policy. In the subsequent school board meeting, which ran more than four hours, Lowery was pressured to resign. One speaker said, "If Mrs. Lowery does not resign or is not reprimanded for her actions, I believe she is more dangerous than any book in our library" (Alba, 2023).

She refused to resign. The board voted to publicly censure her, an action with no actual consequences (Alba, 2023).

While more of the original challenged books had been returned to school library shelves, former trustee Hackett has been tracking the library collection via freedom of information requests. He noted that many of the books on the original review list have "quietly disappeared."

The Data

The data supports the conclusion that book challenges have substantially increased since the *Legislating Librarianship* paper was written in 2016 (Work, 2016). The book challenges have escalated in number, scope, frequency, magnitude, politicization, and in the level of vitriol directed toward libraries and librarians.

In 2016, 323 unique books were challenged (Hauser, 2017). In just the first eight months of 2023, 1915 unique books were challenged (Italie, 2023). If the remainder of 2023 continues at the same rate (number of books per month), 2023 will have around 2871 unique book challenges. This represents an increase of more than 780% over the amount of unique book challenges seven years prior.

The way books are being challenged has also changed. Most school and public libraries have a formal policy and process for book challenges, but the vast majority of recent book challenges have bypassed the formal process. In 2022, 98% of the documented book challenges did not follow the library or school's established book challenge process (Haupt, 2022). Frequently those making the challenge don't even attempt an informal discussion of book concerns with a librarian. Some book challengers pack school and library board meetings, often with non-residents, to try to strengthen their case. Lawsuits have been levied against libraries for housing "inappropriate" materials. Community members have even called law enforcement to report the threat to children posed by the presence of "pornography" in libraries. Some school administrators have ignored their own school library's policies to selectively remove books, while some teachers and librarians have self-censored to avoid the loss of their job or teaching license, or to potentially be subject to civil or criminal charges.

For some book challenges, community members bypass library protocols and have gone directly to the mayor, the city council, county officials, a state legislator, or the governor. This has frequently led to lawmakers accommodating the complainant by initiating legislation that will result in book bans. Legislative book banning was in the early years of trending in 2016; previously, most book challenges had been initiated by individuals or small groups of parents objecting to a limited number of titles. By the 2022-2023 school year, 74% of the book ban cases were the direct result of organized efforts, including advocacy groups, elected officials, or enacted legislation (Meehan & Friedman, 2023).

In the first eight months of 2023, more than 130 bills have been proposed in state legislatures across the country related to public and school library book bans (EveryLibrary, 2023). Most of this legislation aims to eliminate all books in vaguely defined categories such as "harmful to minors," "obscene," "causing discomfort [regarding racism or sexism]" or "not meeting community standards." About a dozen of the bills propose to eliminate the affirmative defense for teachers, librarians, schools, and public libraries (EveryLibrary, 2023), leaving these individuals and institutions liable to criminal penalties for having books in their libraries that do not meet what are current state law requirements. These legislative book challenges frequently focus on large categories of books, so a book challenge or legislative ban often encompasses dozens or even hundreds of books at a time. Consequently, this type of "legislative librarianship" has accounted for the vast majority of unique book titles being challenged in the past few years.

Conclusion

The types of books and the way that they are challenged – and defended – by those with opposing views has become thoroughly politicized and often wrapped in religion. Neither side will back down because both sides believe they hold the higher moral ground, either on the side of First Amendment rights and intellectual freedom or on the side of personal and/or religious value systems. Some book challengers have made the leap from moral superiority to unfounded and cruel accusations, claiming that librarians are trying to "indoctrinate" children, or even that the librarians are pedophiles who are grooming victims. As long as the disagreement becomes politicized or becomes a "my morals vs. your morals" argument, neither side will win, and everyone will lose.

The library is the one place in a community best positioned to be a neutral gathering space in an increasingly discordant society. A library is not a democracy; it trades "majority rule" for "everybody is welcome." Books found objectionable to some patrons are sought out by others.

Those of every age, income level, education level, religion, race, ethnic background, language, sexual orientation, gender, political views – or any other kind of difference – are all welcome. But in order for the library to be welcoming to all, everyone – including the self-appointed "book police" – needs to learn to leave politics at the door.

The library can and should serve as a mirror to reflect individual value systems and "community standards." However, an equally important role is to serve as a window to reveal other – perhaps more challenging, perhaps even objectionable – perspectives. The library is the ideal place to open that window, and open one's mind…by simply opening a book.

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APPENDIX

Related Censorship Actions and Responses

In addition to the many attempts at legislating librarianship, there has been an uptick in other censorship initiatives – and anti-censorship initiatives – related to school curricula, bookstores, drag shows, and library programs.

National organization demands removal of specific "pornographic" books

The national organization County Citizens Defending Freedom (CCDF) demanded that the Polk County School District in Florida remove 16 specific books for "objectionable content."

In response, the district formed a committee of parents, teachers, students, and librarians to review each challenged book. All books were retained, with the stipulations that some be limited to certain grade levels (Chu & Octavio, 2022). The district implemented an opt-in system in which parents could opt for their children to check out the contested books that the parents specify. The books would not be on the student-accessible shelves. In August 2022, this was changed to an opt-out system, for parents to state which books their children are not permitted to check out. All the challenged books were returned to the shelves (Lora, 2022).

The CCDF followed through on their threats for legal action, claiming that the district is breaking laws forbidding "distribution of pornography to minors" by returning the books to the shelves (Lanning & Blazonis, 2022). Robert Goodman, leader of the CCDF, wants the district to remove 12 of the contested books from the shelves, with a return to the opt-in system. He filed reports with local sheriff's office. When they did not immediately respond, he "wrote an email to Gov. Ron DeSantis, Attorney General Ashley Moody, State Attorney Brian Haas of the 10th Judicial Circuit based in Bartow, members of the Florida legislature, county commissioners and the Polk School Board" (Nutcher, 2022, August 31).

Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd reviewed the complaint with the state attorney, and responded with a public statement. He called the books in question "vile, odious, and abhorrent" and "filthy and nasty." However, he conceded that the books did not meet the state's threshold to be deemed "obscenity" (Nutcher, 2022, September 9).

Sheriff Judd recommended that Goodman ask the School Board to re-vote. Goodman filed an appeal with the school board. School Board attorney Wesley Bridge II agreed to review the submitted paperwork, but later said, "precedent-setting case law favors the opt-out policy because the government cannot limit access to speech, books and ideas." (Nutcher, 2022, September 9).

Sheriff Judd also suggested Goodman file a civil suit against the school board to seek an injunction [against the book], and/or to seek to change Florida law [on the definition of obscenity] (Nutcher, 2022, September 9).

Resolution: There are no reports of further action.

Pulitzer-Prize winning graphic novel Maus removed from school curriculum; comic store fights back

The Holocaust nonfiction graphic novel *Maus* has been removed from the curriculum at McMinn Country Schools in Tennessee, despite a state curriculum review that had approved the book. The school board claims that it is not an appropriate book for students (Guzman, 2022).

Status of the action: A huge outcry against the ban by parents and community members has not convinced the school board to reconsider the policy (Kasakove, 2022).

In response, a Knoxville, Tennessee comic bookstore started a GoFundMe campaign with the goal of "providing as many students as possible" with copies of *Maus*. The campaign nearly quadrupled its $20,000 goal (Dominguez, 2022).

Idaho bookstore dispenses free book after Boise school board ban

In response to the Boise school district removing 23 books from school library shelves, a local shop, Rediscovered Books, stepped in. The shop solicited donations to be able to provide the censored books to local students at no cost. Dozens of community members, both adults and children, lined up to pick up free copies of the banned books at a local coffee shop. The bookstore anticipates giving away more than 1300 books over the summer. (Dawson, 2022).

Status of the action: The bookstore continues its initiative, the Read Freely Project, which "aims to connect people through literature without censorship" (Bringhurst, 2023).

The district continues to work on developing an updated book review process.

Pennsylvania's Central York School District uses diversity reading list to ban books

At the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year, the principal of the high school in Central York disseminated a list of books to be banned from use in the district. The book list focused on Black authors and experiences. A large proportion of the books had been listed on a diversity reading list that had been compiled the previous year by the district's committee for diversity and inclusion, but had never been distributed to faculty (WHYY, 2022). After student protests, the Board of Education restored the books (Brandt, 2022). In an editorial in a local paper, Joe D'Orsie, a candidate for the state House of Representatives, claimed to be outraged by book bans, but called the entire episode a "myth" and a "false narrative" because the list of diverse books included books that qualified as "pornographic" and "hate-filled" (D'Orsie, 2022). A high school teacher in the district, who requested anonymity, said, "Now my concern is you have teachers afraid to teach" (Locurto, 2022). Student Christiana Ellis, who is Black, objected to silencing the voices and erasing the history of BIPOC writers. She reasoned, "It's not indoctrination, it's education" (WHYY, 2022).

Mississippi team launched Kickstarter project to combat literacy gap for Black boys

When former college roommates Alison Buehler and Jo Winn realized that there were not enough fun kids' books featuring "relatable Black characters," they launched a book series and a Kickstarter campaign to fund it. Working under the pen name Matt Maxx, under the auspices of the non-profit Homestead Educational Center, they created and started self-publishing the Big Monty series in 2019. They have now sold more than 15,000 copies of the first four volumes in the series, and have expanded the Matt Maxx team to five writers, educators, and artists. Current writer Rudi Rudd wants readers who aren't Black to "get to see classmates who don't look like them doing normal things" (Bateman, 2022).

Florida rejects textbooks that run afoul of state regulations on content

Florida's Governor Ron DeSantis issued an edict that state-approved textbooks in any subject could not include anything that might be interpreted as critical race theory, Common Core curriculum, or social-emotional learning/character education. In 2022, 41% (54 out of 132) of the considered math textbooks were rejected. Specifically at the K-5 level, "an alarming 71 percent were not appropriately aligned with Florida standards or included prohibited topics and unsolicited strategies" (Florida Department of Education Press Office, 2022). In 2023, 19% of the social studies textbooks were approved, but after working with publishers to correct "inaccuracies" and align the textbooks with Florida law, 60% were approved (Florida Department of Education Press Office, 2023).

Tampa Bay area district tries to pre-empt new Florida legislation affecting library collections

In response to the legislative measures being considered and enacted by the Florida legislature, the Pasco County school district pre-emptively did an audit of district library collections to find books that might evenly remotely be considered to run afoul of state laws. However, they did this not to purge the books, but to preserve them. In order to avoid "being in the business of book banning," the district developed an opt-out system for parents to prohibit their own children from accessing such books (Solochek, 2022).

Status of the action: A school representative said that no books were under review or had been banned in the Pasco County district as of August, 2023 (Abad, 2023).

New York City's and Brooklyn's public libraries offer library access to America's teens

In response to book censorship around the country, New York City's and Brooklyn's public library systems made the unprecedented offer of free cardholder privileges to teens throughout America, in order to access the libraries' digital books and resources. The New York Public Library's program, Books for All, offered free access to anyone in America aged 13 and up from, a program originally slated to run from mid-April through the end of May 2022 (Shivaram, 2022).

Status of the action: The program is still ongoing for the2023-2024 school year (Blume, 2023).

The Brooklyn Public Library's teen-led program, Books Unbanned, allows young people from 13-21 across America to apply for a free library card and have free access to the library's eBooks and audiobooks for a year. A 16-year-old member of the Brooklyn Public Library Council, Raisa Islam, explained, "Intellectual freedom should be given to everyone" (Campano, 2022).

Status of the action: The Boston Public Library, the LA County Public Library, and the Seattle Public Library have joined them in this initiative (Brooklyn Public Library, 2023).

States, school districts, and coalitions strive to combat book bans

California's Assembly Bill 1078 proposes to prohibit school boards from banning books solely on the basis of culture or history pertaining to BIPOC and LGBTQ+ people. The state code was updated to require the inclusion of "the experience of racial, ethnic, and LGBTQ+ groups in the curriculum (Jones, 2023).

Status of the bill: Enacted, 2023, September 25 (California Legislative Information, 2023).

Illinois HB2789 outlaws book bans. The bill stipulates that the State Library and State Librarian adopt the American Library Association's Bill of Rights, which "indicates that reading materials should not be proscribed, removed, or restricted because of partisan or personal disproval" (Illinois.gov, 2023).

Status of the bill: Enacted, June 12, 2023, with an effective date of January 1, 2024 (Illinois General Assemble, 2023).

Illinois Governor JB Pritzker has also been involved in efforts to combat other types of censorship in schools. He joined other state governors in urging educational publisher "to not censor educational materials in the face of additional pressure from Republicans." The governor also sent a letter to the head of the College Board, urging them to "reverse the decision to remove crucial parts of the curriculum from the Advanced Placement course in African American Studies after pressure to do so from Florida Governor Ron DeSantis" (Illinois.gov, 2023).

Rhode Island House Bill 6066 implements an affirmative defense for teachers, librarians, and museum staff to protect them from prosecution for providing materials to minors that might be claimed to be inappropriate or indecent (Nunes, 2023).

Status of the bill: Held in committee for further study, March 16, 2023 (LegiScan, 2023).

New York's S6350, dubbed the "Freedom to Read Act," was designed to combat books band by ensuring that "school libraries and librarians are able to provide students with access to the widest array of age-appropriate materials available to such school district" (Harding, 2023).

Status of the bill: In committee (The New York State Senate, 2023).

Dorchester School District 2 in South Carolina denied a proposal to allow any community member to challenge library materials. They made it policy that book challenges are limited books to parents and legal guardians of current students (Quon, 2023).

A coalition of educators, advocacy groups, and law firms has filed a federal lawsuit to declare New Hampshire's "broad concepts" law unconstitutional. This law, passed in June 2021, prohibits instruction relating to racism, sexism, or other forms of discrimination in such a way as to imply that specific groups of people are inherently racist or sexist or otherwise discriminatory. The law gives the state's department of education the authority to fire and/or revoke the teaching credentials of educators who are found to have broken the law (GLAD, 2023).

The law assigns significant power to the public at large, allowing New Hampshire residents to log into a website to lodge complaints about educators and to sue schools over teachers they believe are flouting the law. The national group Moms for Liberty, a driving force in many book banning efforts, has offered $500 to the first resident to successfully file a complaint against a teacher. The lawsuit plaintiffs claim that the state department of education often escalates complaints to school superintendents before an investigation has taken place (GLAD, 2023).

With the law's wording being "deceptively vague" and the punishments severe, teachers have changed what they teach to avoid being targeted. Plaintiffs in the lawsuit believe that the law is "actively discouraging public school teachers from teaching and talking about race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and gender identity inside and outside the classroom" (GLAD, 2023).

Defying the law in principle has also been shown to have repercussions for teachers. High school history teacher John Dube signed an online petition to teach "honest" history after the law was passed. A New-Hampshire based right-wing group subsequently published the list, with an intent to "shame" those who signed the petition. Dube was "subject to online harassment, threats and obscenities," ultimately leading to intervention by local police and an FBI investigation (GLAD, 2023).

Status of the lawsuit: A federal judge ruled that the lawsuit had sufficient merit to proceed in January 2023 (ACLU, 2023, January 12).

Parents concerned for schoolbook bans respond by founding "Florida Freedom to Read" project.

Started in January 2022, the project connects parent organizations across the state of Florida and focuses [their] energy on defending every student's right to access information and ideas while at school." The group has been lauded by the American Association of School Librarians for their outstanding support of school library programs in the state (ALAnews,

2023).

The group has an active social media presence that highlights news and encourages conversation on censorship activities in the state (CouchCorrespondent, 2022). One area of advocacy has been in the state's approval process for textbooks. After some math books had been rejected, members of the project examined the books to find out why. Member Raegan Callway Miller found the following passage, and thinks it might have been deemed to be in the prohibited category of "social emotional learning" (Silcox, 2022).

> "A little girl is excited to be in first grade math, and it says what is you super power, it's a mindset, and then we listen to our friends and teachers, and then we think about each other's ideas" (Silcox, 2022).

Miller worries that prohibiting such language will prevent students from becoming conversant in how to collaborate and share ideas.

Another rejected math textbook has a graph on the number of LBGTQ service members discharged from the military. Such an example would defy the state's "don't say gay" law. (Silcox, 2022).

"Book bullies" hide library and bookstore books on objectionable topics

Book censors have responded to commercial bookstore and public library displays of books they find objectionable by "hiding" those books elsewhere in the bookstore or library. In Anderson's Bookshop, outside of Chicago, the books being hidden are those that depict a Black person on the cover. In some libraries, LGBTQ+ books are targeted. An organization called CatholicVote, which is not officially affiliated with the Catholic church, urged people to participate in "Hide the Pride," by visiting their local library and removing all the Gay Pride books on display in the children's section. In order to keep the books out of the hands of children, they were instructed to check out the books, take them home, and put them out of reach of children (Steinburg, 2022).

Virginia legislators seek a restraining order to prohibit selling teens "offensive" books

Former Republican Congressional candidate Tommy Altman and his lawyer Tim Anderson, who serves in the Virginia House of Delegates, are trying to restrict the local Barnes & Noble store from selling two specific books with LGBTQ+ themes to minors without parental consent (Picchi, 2022). The court granted a hearing, requiring the authors and publishers to defend the books against Altman's accusation that the books be classified as "obscene for unrestricted viewing by minors" (Albanese, 2022, June 3). Lawyers for the publishers and for Barnes and Noble have petitioned for the case to be dropped, claiming that "the suits as filed are defective" (Albanese, 2022, June 22).

Status of the bill: Retired Judge Pamela Baskervill, who originally allowed the suit to be filed, ultimately threw out the case. She cited Constitutional/First Amendment grounds (Moomaw, 2022).

Educators get fired over reading and providing access to "disallowed" materials

Former Cobb County, Georgia elementary teacher Katie Rinderle was fired after reading the picture book, *My Shadow is Purple*, to her fifth grade class. The vote by the school board was split along political party lines, with the decision made by the Republican majority. The district said she was fired because she "improperly read a book on gender fluidity."

Status of the case: She is appealing the decision (Fox 5 Atlanta Digital Team, 2023).

Markayle Gray of Charlotte, North Carolina was fired for using the book *Dear Martin* in his seventh grade English class during Black History Month. The book is about a Black teen who is "racially profiled and arrested before symbolically writing to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr." Gray's attorney stated that the school principal had recommended the book to Gray. The teacher was fired after parent complaints that the book and the ensuing classroom discussions were divisive and politicized.

Status of the case: Gray is suing for lost pay and benefits (Sáenz, 2023).

Assistant principal Toby Price was fired for reading a humorous children's book, *I Need a New Butt*. The district claims, "Mr Price's contract should be terminated due to his incompetence, neglect of duty, and for good cause." *Status of the case*: Price appealed the decision and the appeal was denied (Ying, 2022).

Sarah Bonner, a middle school teacher in Illinois, was fired for offering the book *This Book is Gay* at a "book-tasting" event in which students could choose one of the pre-selected books for free reading. A parent called the police on Bonner, citing "child endangerment." After being put on leave so that the school district could investigate, Bonner resigned. Bonner explains, "The notion that I was putting children in danger because of books – I didn't feel safe. I knew I couldn't go back" (Campoamor, 2023).

The Oklahoma Secretary of Education, Ryan Walters, wants Summer Boismeir's teaching credentials revoked. She was accused by a parent of making political comments in class. The high school teacher in Norman had covered her classroom bookshelves with paper, on which was written, "Books the state doesn't want you to read," referencing HB1775, which limits how teacher can discuss race and gender. The law's passage also limited what books teachers could provide to students. Boismeir also posted a QR code that linked to the Brooklyn Public Library's "Books Unbanned Project," which was launched to give students across the country online access to books that may be banned in their local classrooms and libraries. Walters explained that giving students access to "banned and pornographic material" was just cause for revoking her teaching license. He stated, "There is no place for a teacher with a liberal political agenda in the classroom" (Hernandez, 2022).

Status of the case: Walters filed formal paperwork to revoke Boismeir's teaching certificate. After the loss of her job and amid threats against her, Boismeir eventually moved out of state and secured employment at the Brooklyn Public Library (KOKH staff, 2023).

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Author

Jill Work has more than a decade of experience as a public children's librarian, school librarian, library consultant, and teacher in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. She holds an MLIS from University of Alabama and currently freelances as a public library presenter and educational STEM coach in Pennsylvania. Professional activities include serving as a peer reviewer for *Art Documentation*, the journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America, regularly serving as a judge for Future Engineers, and presenting at professional conferences, including the national American Association of School Librarians conference, the New Jersey and Pennsylvania Association of School Librarians state conferences, the Future Ready Librarians digital conference, the International Society for Technology in Education national conferences, the New Jersey Association of Independent Schools Innovation Symposium, New Jersey's Lead Like a Girl conferences, and the New York Maker Faire. Work's study *Legislating Librarianship* was published as a white paper by the journal *The Political Librarian* in 2016 (Work, 2016).

Not Doing It: Avoidance and Sex-Related Materials in Libraries

REBECA C. JEFFERSON
EWA DZIEDZIC-ELLIOTT

ABSTRACT

This article discusses how affective discomfort is connected to librarian and library worker avoidance of collection development tasks when it comes to sex-related information. It is an area of concern given the recent wave of book bans and challenges, and in some cases legal action directed at librarians and library workers in the United States. Most of these challenges have involved materials dealing with sexuality, specifically LGBTQ+ identities and expressions. Though these challenges have mainly played out in public and school libraries, their effect is also being felt in academic libraries. Using patterns found in the literature, this analysis discusses librarians' affective discomfort, uncertainty, and emotional reactivity around sexual issues, its relationship to avoidance of collection development tasks in this area, and how this avoidance can have real-world consequences for vulnerable populations.

Introduction

In the last two years, the library profession in the United States has seen a rising wave of book challenges and proposed bans. These challenges have had an unusual level of rage behind them, including threats of legal action, personal attacks, targeted harassment campaigns, and in one case, even a threat of criminal charges against a library (Gruver, 2021). According to a report by the nonprofit group PEN America, 41% of the challenged books included LGBTQ+ themes or protagonists, 40% had a protagonist of color, and 22% had sexual content (Friedman and Farid Johnson, 2022).

Though librarians all over the country, in many different types of libraries, have met this moment with great courage, it remains appropriate to be concerned about the level of access to materials related to sex, gender, and sexuality that libraries are willing or able to provide. To paraphrase Susan Faludi, the present backlash has been set off not by achievement of full equality, but by the increased possibility that equality might be achieved. This backlash is a pre-emptive strike, designed to stop us long before we reach equality (Faludi, 2006). Which is to say, a backlash is not a sign that we in the library world were actually providing the level of access to these materials that our patrons needed; it is merely a sign that we had started to get marginally closer. In fact, as we will demonstrate in this article, there is significant

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evidence to suggest that problems with access to these materials preceded this current sociopolitical backlash.

In this article, we explore librarian research on the topic of collection development as it relates to sex, gender, and sexuality, with a particular focus on LGBTQ+ themes, and sexual health education. We chose to focus broadly on sex-related materials, not exclusively on materials related to the LGBTQ+ community or LGBTQ+ sexuality, because through the authors' research and experience, we have observed that when challenges to these materials take place, although the potential *harms caused* by the challenge and its aftermath can vary considerably depending on the community, the *actual concerns* expressed in these challenges do not significantly differ from those expressed in challenges to materials dealing with heterosexual sex. In each case, there is something here that someone objects to seeing in the library, and that something is *a body* (or multiple bodies, or the wrong kind of body) *in a sexual situation* (or the wrong kind of sexual situation). More recent materials challenges in school libraries in particular, have reflected this broad focus, with multi-book challenges that have included LGBTQ+ materials like Maia Kobabe's *Gender Queer: A Memoir* (the most challenged book of 2022 according to the American Library Association) as well as less specific sex-related resources like Erika Moen's *Let's Talk About It: The Teen's Guide to Sex, Relationships, and Being A Human* (Flanagan, 2023). Identities that are perceived to hinge on non-heteronormative sexuality, or the fact of existence in a non-cisgendered body, may often be the starting points for such challenges. But in practice, it is sexuality in general that comes under fire, and therefore we have chosen to maintain a broad focus. However, as noted above the potential harms of these challenges, and the anxieties and chilling effects that ripple out from them, are not evenly distributed. Therefore, in our discussion of potential harms, though we do discuss sexual health generally, we have placed special focus on the LGBTQ+ community.

In this article, we demonstrate that librarians and library workers are neither well-prepared by their training, nor supported systemically, to tackle the barrage of complex emotional and ethical issues that they must face in the course of collecting materials that relate to sex, gender, and sexuality. We believe that this lack of training and institutional support contributes to an overall culture of avoidance and fear in the collection of these materials, a phenomenon often referred to as self-censorship. This article does not enter into a debate as to whether or not censorship is an appropriate term in this context. Instead, we seek to demonstrate that the relationship between affective discomfort and behavioral avoidance, which is well-known in the behavioral sciences, applies to the practice of librarianship in this area. We argue that while we as librarians know what we should be doing, and we may have good intentions, we tend to avoid real change, and this avoidance is enabled and encouraged by a complex system of personal and institutional factors.

While we may be used to thinking of emotions in an active way, as declarative expressions, more often, unexamined, uncomfortable emotions manifest themselves as avoidant behavior. Avoidant behavior is best understood as the absence of behavior: inaction, procrastination, and the use of phrases such as, "I am too busy" and "that is too difficult" and "you just don't understand how things work here." When viewed through this lens, a review of relevant library literature over time demonstrates that affective discomfort in librarians appears to be a significant factor affecting the collection of sex-related materials. Unfortunately, dealing with affective discomfort is neither quick nor easy. It is also not something that any traditional academic program prepares people to do in an organized way. Even within those

programs that train mental health workers, the amount and depth of training related to coping with the trainee's own affective responses can vary. However, useful elements from this type of training could be incorporated into librarian training, particularly in reference, collection management or general management coursework. Best practices for the implementation of such a solution will not be a focus of this paper, though we will make an argument for its importance. This article focuses on an analysis of the existing literature, presenting evidence of the themes of behavioral avoidance and the many factors that nourish and sustain it, as well as the tangible ways that this avoidance affects access to information.

We acknowledge that for some librarians, particularly public librarians, who are not a focus of this analysis, the work environment has become so openly hostile in certain parts of the United States that behavioral avoidance, when it is practiced, can become an understandable matter of survival. Additionally, the authors do not wish to minimize or diminish the extraordinary courage being demonstrated daily by librarians and library workers living on the front lines in these environments, trying to implement best practices while being attacked on social media, accosted in person, and actively threatened with harm (Daly, 2022; Kingkade, 2022). However, these struggles also contribute to a climate of fear that affects all librarians and library workers.

This article discusses how affective discomfort is connected to librarian and library worker avoidance of collection development tasks when it comes to sex-related information. The term "affect" will be used here in its psychological sense, to mean personal attitudes, feelings, biases, etc. In psychological terms, "emotion" refers only to what is expressed. "Affect" refers specifically to what is felt, and is therefore a more precise term, even though the quality of affect is often empirically inferred from emotional expression or specific behaviors. This paper argues that avoidance of the topic of sex is correlated with affective discomfort, and that this discomfort is, in turn, correlated with avoidant behavior which, in effect, ends up restricting patron access to potentially vital sexual health information. This paper is not seeking to make an argument about any single librarian intentionally causing active harm, or about intent of any sort. Rather, it argues that the absence of something, the avoidance of action alone, can cause harm. Neither intent nor awareness on the part of the librarian is required. The avoidance itself creates the problem. Avoidance matters when it comes to this material because, in practice, not dealing with it has the potential to inflict active harm on some of the most vulnerable populations libraries serve, including people with disabilities, transgender and non-binary people, and sexual minorities of all kinds. In the case of trans people, in particular, the potential for harm is greater than many may realize, as reliable sexual health information, in particular information about transition-related care and safer sex, is a survival need in this population.

Historical context and definitions

Over 40 years ago, in 1978, the American Library Association (ALA) added its first statement regarding sex-related materials in libraries to its policy manual. That statement affirmed that providing information about sex and sexual health was part of the mission of the library, and consequently, sex-related materials should be available in libraries (original text quoted in Cohen, 2008). A version of this statement has persisted in every subsequent revision of the ALA policy manual, though the wording has been re-worked over the years (ALA, 2010). Notably, neither of the authors' relevant ALA divisions, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) and the American Association of School Librarians

(AASL), have policies of their own specifically relating to information about sex and sexual health, though both divisions broadly echo ALA policy. ACRL has the "Intellectual Freedom Principles for Academic Libraries," which do not specifically mention sex or sexual health, except to add "sexual orientation" to a list of protected categories against discrimination (ALA, 2006). In the case of AASL, the National School Library Standards do not specifically mention sex or sex education, but do advocate broadly for intellectual freedom and the representation of a range of perspectives (American Association of School Librarians, 2018).

Similarly, and from a more international perspective, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has drafted policy statements broadly supporting intellectual freedom (1999) and warning against censorship (2019). Neither of these policy statements specifically mention sex or sex education, though gender is mentioned. Interestingly, however, IFLA's 2019 Statement on Censorship is one of the few policy documents we encountered in our research that specifically mentions the possibility of "self-censorship," which the policy goes on to define as "conscious or unconscious choices by librarians and other information workers not to give access to specific works on the basis of fear or uncertainty about the reaction by authorities or users." In its recommendations, the 2019 IFLA Statement further urges librarians to "build understanding of the risks of self-censorship."

The use of this phrase, "self-censorship," in IFLA policy is notable. When the topic of avoidance as it relates to sex, specifically materials on LGBTQ+ populations, has been discussed in the library literature in the past (as in Antell et al., 2013), the phrase "self-censorship" has often been used. Though IFLA's policy is careful to acknowledge that such behavior is not always conscious, this phrase tends to provoke a strong reaction in librarian readers, as it is often assumed to imply intentional behavior. As noted in the introduction, it will not be a part of the project of this paper to debate what does or does not constitute censorship, writ large, or whether or not librarians consciously intend to censor or self-censor in their collecting practices. For the purpose of this article, the presence or non-presence of conscious intent does not matter. This analysis focuses on avoidance, and the potential consequences of that avoidance. Avoidance is a behavioral phenomenon that occurs regardless of conscious intent.

Despite the ALA's continual re-affirmation of its policy statement, implicit endorsement by affiliated professional groups, and similar policy statements by international groups, the few sporadic surveys and research studies that have been conducted since the early 2000s demonstrate that what is affirmed in policy is not playing out in real-world library practice in the United States. These studies point to a discomfort on the part of librarians and library workers to engage with sex-related material, particularly in collection development. A 2007 study of health professions librarians showed that even among those most highly trained in the handling of sensitive health topics, sex is a source of discomfort, lack of knowledge, and fear (Siegel, 2007). Though this discomfort might have some roots in real-world concerns, several studies seem to show a disconnect between what librarians and library staff believe to be true (about ALA policy, about the law, etc.) and what is actually written into policy.

"I just don't know enough:" Discomfort and the knowledge gap

As noted above, the ALA affirms that all libraries play an active role in providing comprehensive sex-related education materials, programming, etc. The statement does not, however, provide much guidance on what exactly the words "active role" and

"comprehensive" mean in this context (ALA, 2010). The question of what constitutes "comprehensive sex education" is in itself highly political and emotionally charged. It is perilously easy to slide from discussing what comprehensive sex education could be, on a medical or scientific level, to what it should be, on a moral level. What is comprehended by the word "comprehensive" in this case can depend on a multitude of factors, including upbringing, cultural background, religious beliefs, and political position. Librarians and library staff come into libraries with an equally wide variety of pre-existing beliefs on the subject of sex, and a wildly varying level of education on the subject.

Librarians, even those with multiple advanced degrees and professional specializations, are not expected to be experts on any or all of the subjects on which they provide guidance, and health is hardly the only subject area that requires a certain amount of highly specialized knowledge and care to handle in library work. However, sexual health is unique in that even among those people who might be expected to hold subject matter expertise, the knowledge gap is more shockingly enormous than most people realize. To take just one high level example: Medical training on the subject of human sexuality is wildly inconsistent across U.S. medical schools, and most sexologists and sex educators agree that the current level of training is insufficient to prepare physicians for practice (Shindel et al., 2016).

If even trained clinicians are underprepared to tackle sex-related subject matter, it is highly likely that the same is true of librarians and library staff. Though there has been quite a bit of research into consumer health training (or rather, the lack thereof) in professional library degree programs, including multiple studies led by Smith (2006, 2014) and a more recent study by Rubinstein (2017), the authors were not able to find any studies that specifically looked at training related to sexual health or the handling of sex-related materials in those same degree programs, which in itself is telling.

Though the authors were not able to find good data about training on sex-related materials in professional library degree programs, there are data about professional practice. In Cohen's study of professional librarians, most were not aware that the ALA had a policy of affirming access to sex education and related materials (Cohen, 2008). Siegel suggested that even medical librarians, professionals with subject matter expertise in the area of healthcare, do not feel knowledgeable about sexual health and are uncomfortable with questions on this subject (Siegel, 2007). A larger survey of both professional and non-professional library staff in 2016 revealed that most staff did not believe providing access to sex education materials was part of the library's role, and many even believed it might be illegal (Martinez et al., 2016). This fear persists across a wide variety of studies, and will be addressed further later in this article.

The ALA policy implies that it is part of a librarian's job to know what constitutes comprehensive sex education, and exhorts them to "assume a leadership role." But the evidence discussed in the previous paragraph suggests that this is not something most library staff, professional and otherwise, are educationally prepared to do, express comfort in doing, or even view as their role in the first place. Additionally, the perception that handling sex-related reference questions requires a high degree of specialized knowledge obscures the fact that even those professionals perceived as health specialists do not necessarily have this knowledge. As noted previously, the topic is unique not only in its sensitive, socially taboo status, but in the enormity of the knowledge gap that surrounds it. We argue that these factors are strongly correlated, and that, therefore, it is not enough to address the knowledge gap alone. The discomfort and distress must also be addressed because it is the distress that

causes avoidance.

Discomfort and resource selection

Our major focus in reviewing existing literature is collection development, because this is an area of library work in which this discomfort makes itself evident, and where the stakes tend to be highest in terms of both effect on patrons and consequences for library workers. The debate over materials selection and censorship in library collection management is not new, nor is it unique to sex-related materials. From a practical standpoint, it is obviously not possible for libraries to collect everything. Selection is an inevitability. The question that we have to wrestle with in doing this work is first what ought to (or ought not) guide selection, and then how to put that principle into practice.

In his 2002 piece on collection management and censorship, Doyle argues that Asheim's classic distinction between approaching collection management as a selector, who is looking for reasons to keep a piece of material, as opposed to a censor, who is looking for reasons to reject it, is not useful in practice. As quoted in Doyle, Asheim advocated that the collection be unbiased, even if the librarian is biased – Essentially arguing for libraries to take a position of deliberate neutrality. Doyle acknowledges that putting this principle into practice is a complex endeavor and does not delve further into this complexity. Instead, he sets up a useful argument against what he calls the "steward-librarian" position, which he argues is a form of paternalistic censorship, that is, restricting a patron's access even to those materials a librarian might deem dangerous, for the patron's own good or for the protection of the public, amounts to censorship, and an unacceptable infringement on a library patron's autonomy (Doyle, 2002).

This "stewardship" position is directly relevant to sex-related materials, though these are never discussed by Doyle. The question of restricting access, whether through a so-called "behind the counter" policy, a search engine filter, or simply not collecting particular items, is especially fraught when it comes to sex-related materials. Sex is a personally and politically sensitive topic, subject to social taboos and judgements about pornography and obscenity. Not only are there wide differences of opinion about what makes something pornographic or obscene, there are also potentially even wider differences of opinion as to whether or not materials deemed pornographic are in some way dangerous to the public, or to a particular segment of the public. The subjective judgment of obscenity, and the complexity of deciding whether what is obscene is also dangerous, and if so, to whom, and in what way, are all weighty topics, and beyond the scope of this paper. However, the existence of these debates only serves to underscore the degree of both intellectual and emotional complexity that surrounds sex-related materials, even when they are presented in what a trained educator, health care professional, or librarian would consider to be a developmentally-appropriate context.

To understand why it matters that librarians collect and facilitate access to material that they (or some of their patrons) might view as pornographic, obscene, deviant or dangerous, whether or not these materials are educational, it helps to remember that not so very long ago, it was socially normative in the United States to view material that depicted LGBTQ+ relationships, and especially sexual behavior, as inherently obscene. Homosexual sex is not mentioned in the current Federal legal precedent used to define obscenity (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2015), but homosexuality was considered a disorder by the American Psychiatric Association until its official diagnostic manual was amended to exclude it in 1973. This same

manual, known as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, or DSM, now in its fifth edition with a new text revision in 2022, still classifies certain types of sexual behavior as disordered to this day. These classifications remain subject to heated debates within the field, as evidenced by discussions that emerged in the literature when the DSM-V was first published (Campbell et al., 2015; First, 2014), and by one of the authors' prior career experience as a psychiatrist.

The view of LGBTQ+ sexuality as inherently obscene was so mainstream in U.S. culture at one point, that materials related to these sexual identities and behaviors were overrepresented in the Library of Congress Delta Collection. The Delta Collection was the official collection of material deemed obscene, often seized in raids, or from the Postal Service due to the Comstock Act and associated state laws. The Comstock Act is a Federal law passed in 1873 that banned the shipping of materials considered "obscene" through the U.S. Postal Service. It has not been enforced for decades, though this may soon change (Perrone, 2023). During enforcement, materials related to behavior that was considered "sexually deviant," from erotica to sexological texts, were housed in the Delta collection until the maintenance of this collection stopped, in roughly 1964 (Adler, 2016). Even today, this relegation to obscene status has marked the way these items are cataloged, and contributes to limitations around access. Because of the outsize influence of the Library of Congress Subject Headings on cataloging in U.S. libraries, these practical access restrictions are both persistent and pervasive. Melissa Adler has written in depth on this dimension of access, and the authors would refer the reader to her extensive work, rather than discuss further here (Adler, 2017). However, it is worth mentioning that the way in which an item is cataloged by the Library of Congress also affects its likelihood of being acquired or kept by the average U.S. librarian, and it is significant that materials related to LGBTQ+ people and their relationships remain disproportionately more likely to have been cataloged in a way that marks them out as obscene.

Fears that LGBTQ+ adults who work with young people will attempt to "groom" them, that is, to prey on them, "convert," or "corrupt" them, persist to this day (Block, 2022; Rogers, 2022). Though librarian scholars such as Cornog argued as late as 2016 that these fears had diminished greatly (Cornog, 2016), the attempts to remove young adult books such as *Gender Queer* from libraries, ongoing all over the United States at the time of this writing, as well as the silencing tactic of labeling librarians and educators as "groomers" on social media (Pendharkar, 2022), are evidence that such fears are still prevalent in the populations served by libraries all over the country. The fears of the public (and the strategic exploitation of those fears by political actors) may lead to backlash, but such instances of public backlash, or even potential backlash, also feed into the personal fears of librarians and library staff, creating a feedback loop that influences librarian behavior, and in turn, the collections, and in turn, patrons.

Martinez et al. drew a link between collection development and library staff attitudes in their 2016 work. Causation is difficult to prove here, but the Martinez group are not the only ones to draw this connection. Nearly a decade before Martinez et al.'s study, Cohen and Siegel also noticed this connection, in 2008 and 2007 respectively. Smith's 2014 work on librarian and library staff's general discomfort with health information, especially when it comes to sensitive or divisive topics, is also relevant here. Additionally, again writing nearly a decade before Martinez, in 2009, Whelan describes one instance of a young adult novel that contained gay sex being repeatedly passed over for purchase. Though she acknowledges

nothing can be concretely proven about the reasons this book was not purchased, she contends that fears of dealing with challenges from the community deter librarians from purchasing LGBTQ+-related materials (Whelan, 2009). More recently, Proctor's 2020 assessment of LGBTQ+ content in the Penn State University Libraries collections found few pre-existing analyses of this nature in academic libraries specifically, and discussed in detail the complexity of performing such an analysis in a multidisciplinary subject area, which is, by its very nature, poorly represented by existing cataloging systems. Her analysis attempted to tackle this complexity through the use of multiple assessment methods, and found notable gaps in her library system's collections (Proctor, 2020).

In a slightly different vein, Drake and Bielefield's 2017 survey of transgender library users' needs reported unmet information needs in multiple categories, with up-to-date medical or physical health information being the most prominent. Drake and Bielefield specifically mention that "libraries were not frequently selected as reliable sources of information by individuals in this study." Qualitative responses to their survey revealed not only concerns about library collections, but also about interactions with librarians, with multiple respondents describing interactions with librarians and library workers ranging from frustrating lack of knowledge about the topic, to borderline hostility (Drake and Bielefield, 2017). In a similar vein, Stewart and Kendrick's work on information barriers among LGBT+ college students in 2019, which itself builds on Lupien's 2007 work, again found that topical, sex-related information was perceived by college students as being difficult to access in academic libraries. Stewart and Kendrick specifically point out that "participants' concerns regarding academic libraries coalesce around their perceptions of the library's collection, rather than the library as physical space" (Stewart and Kendrick, 2019). Because their focus was on surveying student perceptions, rather than looking at collections themselves, one could argue that the problem is one of a knowledge gap on the part of the students, rather than with the resources or the librarians collecting them. However, if we accept that at least one purpose of a library's collection is to serve its users, then the perceptions of these users are sufficient data to argue that their needs are not being met. It is possible that, either instead of or in addition to a problem with selection of resources, libraries have a marketing problem when it comes to sex-related resources. A 2021 study on the use of LGBTQ+-specific research guides in academic and hospital libraries seems to bear out this conclusion. Stevens and Fajardo examined the websites of a total of 187 libraries in the United States and Canada, and found that only about 30% had specific research guides for this material (Stevens and Fajardo, 2021). This finding is alarming, given the uneven way that LGBTQ+-specific topics, and sex-related topics in general, are distributed within the library catalog. As documented by Adler, and more recent work by other cataloging researchers (such as Henry et al., 2022), neither LCSH nor the Dewey Decimal System groups these works very effectively, making curated access points like displays and research guides, as well as librarians and library workers themselves, a crucial resource for access to these materials.

If we assume that the problem is primarily the marketing of resources, not selection, then it is worth asking why the marketing problem exists, and why it seems to persist over time. We have cited Siegel's 2007 work several times in this analysis, but his recent work is instructive in this regard. While most existing research has focused on user perceptions, a 2020 study by Siegel and his team is unique in that it attempted to directly examine librarian confidence and comfort levels in relation to meeting LGBTQ+ information needs. Like the

authors, Siegel et al. posited that the socio-emotional needs of librarians themselves may be an important factor in their ability to meet patron needs. Their analysis is complex and breaks librarian comfort down into three factors: Duty of care/professional responsibility, public visibility, and "shock factor" (a stand-in term for personal biases or shocked reactions that the librarian does not have the training to manage). The Siegel group's preliminary analysis appears to indicate that while most librarians surveyed seemed to understand themselves as having a professional duty toward LGBTQ+ patrons and research questions on related topics (roughly analogous to a clinician's duty of care), concerns about public scrutiny of the librarian's choices, as well as personal discomfort with sex-related topics, were still significant factors. Siegel et al. also found a significant interest in additional training related to cultural competence, resources, and terminology, which aligns with the knowledge gap discussed earlier (Siegel et al., 2020).

Again, how exactly these comfort or discomfort factors influence behavior is difficult to establish. Like any service professional, most librarians probably believe they would err on the side of their professional obligations no matter the scenario. Responses to the Siegel group's survey questions repeatedly showed this sort of hedging. However, at the same time, user perceptions of these resources as difficult to access, librarians as unlikely to be helpful, and the library environment as unwelcoming, persist. Looking at these two trends together, it seems clear that despite what librarians might like to believe about ourselves, something is wrong. The way this correlation seems to persist over time underlines the importance of librarian and library staff fear and distress when thinking about collection development tasks, and how performing them (or avoiding doing so) affects vulnerable populations.

Discomfort causing active harm

It may not be possible to prove with objective data that librarian and staff discomfort is driving self-censorship in collection development, but there does seem to be a correlation between the two. Because of their already marginalized and even stigmatized status, this correlation would disproportionately affect sexual minorities, a term that includes LGBTQ+ people, as well as those who identify as kinky, practice polyamory, or engage in or identify with any other type of sexual behavior, practice, or identity considered to be outside the cis-hetero-monogamous mainstream. Sexual minorities' access to any sexual health information is therefore also disproportionately affected, and not having access to that information has tangible consequences for the health and wellbeing of these marginalized groups.

Take transgender people as an example. The gender presentation and sexual behavior of this population is constantly scrutinized as a source of fear and used to fuel discrimination against them. However, one of the things trans people most urgently require in order to survive and thrive is specific, relevant, and accurate information about sexual health. From a healthcare perspective, particularly when it comes to sexual health, trans people are an incredibly vulnerable group. Consider:

- Trans people are at a disproportionately high risk of becoming infected with HIV. The most current data from UNAIDS reports an HIV prevalence rate of 6.9% among trans people in North America and Western Central Europe (UNAIDS: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2020). For comparison, the prevalence rate of HIV in the general population in the United States is well below 1%. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2022).

- Trans people are disproportionately likely to engage in sex work or survival sex (sex in exchange for food, shelter, etc.) compared to the general population (Grant et al., 2011).
- Trans people also report a rate of suicide attempts that is nearly 9 times higher than the general population (James et al., 2016).

In the face of all these risks, trans people also report a lack of health information, particularly sexual health information relevant to their needs. Of course, lack of information is only one small part of what gets in the way of trans people, especially trans youth, getting the healthcare they need. But when a group is this vulnerable, it is difficult to argue that access to information is not important.

Discomfort and the fear of consequences

If we accept the contentions that access to sex-related materials matters, and that librarian discomfort is correlated with decreased access, then it is worth further exploring the complex set of factors that contribute to this discomfort, and its persistence over time. One potential factor we have already explored is the knowledge gap, both in librarians themselves, and in the wider population. Another potential factor is librarian fears and potential misconceptions about law and policy as they relate to sexual materials.

The few studies examining librarian and library staff attitudes toward sexual materials reflect the persistence of fears regarding legal action, specifically lawsuits. Both Cohen in 2008, then Martinez et al in 2016 found that a large number of library staff (particularly professional staff, including librarians) expressed beliefs that acquiring or recommending certain sex-related materials might be illegal, especially if the materials were for a patron under the age of 18, which is the age of majority in the U.S. This finding remains relevant in the academic library space, particularly for undergraduate colleges, where both enrolled students and students in special programs using the library, may be under the age of 18. Despite these fears, cases of actual legal action against librarians remain quite rare in the U.S. Two recent cases involving public librarians are instructive: In Wyoming, an attempt was made to bring criminal charges against public librarians on obscenity grounds over library materials with sex-related content. In the end, a prosecutor declined to make any criminal charges, as these were not supported by probable cause (Gruver, 2021). In Louisiana, a librarian took the unusual step of bringing a lawsuit herself, alleging defamation by a group that had been harassing her, again over library materials with sex-related content. This case remains in litigation at the time of this writing (Pendharkar, 2022). It is worth noting, however, that despite fears to the contrary, no one has yet successfully sued or legally charged a librarian in the U.S. over the choice to acquire and display sex-related materials. In the one outstanding legal case we found at the time of this writing, it was the librarian who brought the lawsuit.

While lawsuits may still (for now) remain relatively rare, the same is not true about other forms of backlash or attempts at censorship, such as book challenges, requests for removal of materials or displays, or community objections to materials or programming. These forms of backlash are becoming more and more common in public and school libraries, although in academic libraries they remain relatively rare, though they have occurred. The current U.S. wave of book challenges, bans, and attacks on librarians themselves, is centered on school and public libraries. Political strategists have so far chosen to frame the issue of censoring

materials as one of protecting children (or, similarly, protecting the rights of parents to protect their children) from some nebulous, theoretical "harm" that might come from being exposed to certain kinds of content (Gabriel, 2022). The strong emotions driven by this rhetoric are in turn driving a wave of book challenges and bans the likes of which has not been seen in decades, according to records kept by the ALA and other organizations (Hollingsworth and Italie, 2022). As alluded to previously, it is also creating a hostile work environment for school and public librarians, who are facing in-person and social media harassment (Hickson, 2022), and in some cases, massive funding cuts and even library closures (Rushing, 2022).

Academic libraries have, so far, not had much part in this wave of hostility. However, it is worth remembering that although they are seemingly exempt from the furor around providing potentially "obscene" material to children that periodically plagues school and public libraries, academic libraries do remain vulnerable to the extent that they rely on government funding. A 2014 case in South Carolina provides a very clear example: In 2013, The College of Charleston chose Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* as the book for its college-wide reading program "College Reads!", which was administered through the library. The following year, a state legislator who objected to the content of this book proposed cutting the library's budget by $52,000. This legislator also proposed a funding cut of just over $17,000 to the University of South Carolina-Upstate's library, due to its choice of book for its freshman reading program. The book was *Out Loud: The Best of Rainbow Radio*, a nonfiction history of an LGBTQ+ radio program in South Carolina. The funding cuts passed the house, faced opposition in the senate, but were ultimately approved by the governor at the time, Nikki Haley (Chant, 2014; Cohn, 2014; McNeal, 2015). This case set a dangerous precedent in terms of the use of state funding (or its absence) as a punitive measure directed at academic institutions, specifically over the selection of materials. Viewing such a case through a behavioral lens, it is difficult to believe that these consequences and the news coverage surrounding them, would cause no distress among librarians and library staff.

More recently, the state of Florida has provided a distressing example of the potential vulnerability of the academic library. By leveraging his ability to appoint the members of the board of trustees, in early 2023 Governor Ron DeSantis essentially took over leadership of the New College of Florida, filling seats on the board with appointees who share his views, some of whom interfere markedly with the historical mission of the college (Contreras, 2023). The College's faculty recently voted to censure the board, after the board took the worrisome step of denying tenure to five faculty members, an action that is well within the power of similar bodies at most colleges and universities (Anderson, 2023). Though there are legitimate criticisms of the tenure process, the intent of tenure has always been to protect academic freedom, and its denial is a clear threat. Although the new board has not yet taken any specific direct action toward New College's small library as a whole, the recent firing of an out LGBTQ+ librarian with a vague rationale of "restructuring," should be taken extremely seriously (Gholar, 2023). Therefore, academic librarians are just as vulnerable as their school and public counterparts to the chilling effects of fear, and just as likely to engage in behavioral avoidance.

It is worth asking if librarians and library staff would behave differently if they felt better protected from serious consequences over their collection development decisions, whatever the surrounding political climate may be. Stringer-Stanback attempted to test this idea by looking at collecting practices in areas that had, or had not, enacted anti-discrimination

policies more broadly in the community. Her study found that even in communities that had enacted anti-discrimination policies to protect LGBTQ+ people and their interests, the presence of such policies was not correlated with a change in collecting practices of young adult books on LGBTQ+ subjects. Her results suggest that legal protections in and of themselves do not appear to be correlated with a change in collecting practices (Stringer-Stanback, 2011). This was a small study, and it would be interesting to see more studies of this type, in particular studies examining knowledge gaps about policy and law. If feasible, it would be even more interesting to expand or repeat this research in the current political climate. Stringer-Stanback focused on legal protections, but it would also be interesting to investigate more deeply how much protection and support school and academic librarians and library staff feel they are getting from their professional organizations at the local and national levels.

Particularly at the local level, the amount and type of support that professional organizations are willing or able to provide can vary tremendously. At the national level, the American Library Association has made statements in support of librarians and library staff (Executive Board of the ALA, 2022), and affiliated organizations have echoed these statements, but it is not clear how well this translates to librarians and staff actually feeling protected from harm. Through its Office of Intellectual Freedom, and its legal affiliate, the Freedom to Read Foundation, the ALA does work to provide resources to libraries and librarians under attack. But because most of the attacks on libraries and librarians come at a local level, there are limits to what a national organization can do, particularly in the case of school libraries.

In the United States, there are very few broad, national-level protections for libraries and librarians in general. Those that do exist tend to be case law precedents such as the famous case of *Island Trees School District vs. Pico*, which limited the authority of school boards to censor the content of school libraries, using the protection of the First Amendment (U.S. Supreme Court, 1982). When it comes to school libraries, states are free to delegate authority as they see fit, and often delegate it at the local, municipal level, resulting in a fragmented maze of regulations, which often give the most power to local school boards. Depending on state and county level regulations, school boards may have broad latitude to act as they see fit without much oversight, leaving school librarians in a precarious position. Even in areas where support is strong, a school librarian may have very little recourse if their livelihood is threatened. The fear of job loss is a survival-level fear; it is a powerful motivator. Facing it requires not only support, but deliberate preparation.

In academic libraries, the regulatory situation is, if anything, even more fragmented. In theory, academic libraries and librarians should be protected from attempts at censorship by the principle of academic freedom. In practice, however, what that principle is interpreted to mean, and how much weight it is given, depends greatly on the institution – not only its stated mission and vision, but also on its governance structure, and the extent to which it relies on powerful donors and alumni. In public colleges, members of the board of trustees are often political appointees, and these persons can, if they choose, wield a tremendous amount of power. The situation at New College of Florida, outlined above, is an excellent example of this phenomenon. Private colleges and universities, while relatively free of potential state interference, can nonetheless be subject to the whims of governing boards and powerful donors. This is especially true when it comes to tenure and reappointment decisions, which affect academic librarians with faculty status or similar appointment types.

An academic librarian is just as vulnerable to survival-level fears about their job as their school library counterparts. How supported do academic librarians feel in facing these fears, and how might such support be marshalled or demonstrated? Even in places with a strong local chapter of the ACRL, the issues can be highly institution-specific. However, once again, awareness and deliberate preparation are likely to be helpful.

Conclusions: The need to look within our profession

There is a strong instinct in librarianship to attack fear with knowledge. The assumption seems to be that lack of knowledge causes fear, ergo if the group in question simply knew more, they would be less afraid. However, this assumption reveals more about the personality structure of librarians than it does about what works in practice. Many of the studies cited in this article pointed toward a knowledge gap as the problem and made different types of efforts to address this gap. These studies took place years, even decades apart. And yet, similar access issues persisted in each one, and similar recommendations were given again and again. There is a clear pattern emerging from the literature over the years: as a profession we know what is necessary, but this knowledge has not translated reliably into proactive action.

Research on providing education on controversial topics, especially in health sciences fields, has increasingly observed a phenomenon dubbed the "backfire effect." The backfire effect occurs when the provision of educational material in an attempt to refute a misconception, instead strengthens a person's belief in that misconception. Educational psychologist Gregory Trevors and his team contended that effectively counteracting the backfire effect involves dealing with the deep roots of affective responses, including how those responses can be tied to a person's core identity (2016). Their contention is in line with what we already know about the nature of affective responses like fear. Fear is a visceral, hormonal response. It is ancient and evolutionarily persistent because its purpose is to ensure survival. It is powerful for the same reason.

If we know that it is personally difficult for any human being to learn to cope with powerful affective responses, like the fear response, it would be absurd to expect them to simply turn these affective responses off in order to do their work in a library. The relationship between deep affective responses, like fear, and the day-to-day work process, is not something that is discussed in library school curricula in any organized way. It is not something that receives consistent institutional support across the profession in the form of robust professional development that includes practice-based learning. It is not something for which all library workers across the profession have access to support and guidance through their professional organizations, which can be prohibitively expensive to join. Our contention is that the problem with sex-related materials in libraries is part of a larger problem within the profession: We are not doing a good job of emotionally preparing and supporting librarians and library staff in contending with the real-world intersections of the professional and the personal.

Models for this type of institutional preparation and support already exist in professions which, like librarianship, need to marry high-level technical skill with the gritty realities of interpersonal work. Within the mental health professions, for example, there is a robust tradition of practice-based learning that prepares physicians and therapists for difficult interpersonal interactions and escalating situations. Similar practice-based learning could be incorporated into professional development for librarians and library workers, and could be

more consistently implemented in library science degree programs, particularly in training for reference interactions. Those same programs could also offer more consistent training on gender and sex education issues, including training regarding the use of pronouns, creating and implementing inclusive collection development policies, best practices for collection development and promotion given the complex cataloging of these materials, and promoting awareness of, or offering opportunities to interact with, local sexual health educators and counselors.

Librarianship is a profession that stands at the intersection between information organization and human service. Our training has historically tended to do a better job of addressing one side of this intersection than the other. If we wish to form a better path forward, this must change.

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Authors

Rebeca C. Jefferson, MD, MALIS, is the Health and Life Sciences Librarian at The College of New Jersey, serving all departments in the School of Nursing and Health Sciences, as well as the departments of Biology and Chemistry. She holds a MALIS from the iSchool at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and an MD from the University of Minnesota Medical School. She completed her residency in psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics, and practiced adult psychiatry at the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital in Madison, WI for several years prior to changing careers. Though currently retired from clinical practice, Dr. Jefferson remains Board certified in psychiatry by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, and holds a professional certificate in sexual health education and counseling from the University of Michigan School of Social Work.

Ewa Dziedzic-Elliott serves as the subject librarian for all departments in the School of Education. She has 10 years of experience as a K-12 librarian, including work in both elementary and high school settings. She holds an MLIS from Rutgers University and an MA in Polish Language and Literature with a minor in Speech Therapy from Jan Kochanowski University, Poland, EU. She has published in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship and Library Connections*.

Socially Just Library Management in Conservative America

BILL CROWLEY

ABSTRACT

This White Paper addresses how progressive public library directors, other administrators, and trustees can advance social justice in staffing and services while serving conservative Repubican municipalities and counties. Such locales are not not limited to the states won by former President Trump in 2020. In reality, over 38 million of the more than 74 million votes Trump received were in states captured by President Biden (Bump, 2020). Unfortunately, during and after the election, critical race theory (CRT), an ascending philosophy that can spur overdue diversity, equity, and inclusion in progressive areas served by public libraries, became and remains demonized in many conservative communities. As such, its use can impede library social justice efforts when addressing staffing and services. This white paper offers alternative ways to advance social justice librarianship in conservative American contexts through developing interlanguages* and using pragmatic understandings and approaches.

North or South of Interstate 80 – An Illinois Story

Recently, a friend of the author described a meeting with a business associate in Springfield, Illinois. Considered part of "downstate," Springfield is where Pesident Barack Obama jump-started his political career in the state senate. This meeting took place at a local restaurant where the two businessmen were unexpectedly joined by another downstate resident. This newcomer immediately asked if the author's friend was from "north or south of Interstate 80." People living north of Interstate 80 are more likely to be Democratic "Chicagoland" progressives. Those from south of Interstate 80 may well be Republican conservatives. The author's friend admitted he lived north of Interstate 80 and was from Oak Park, perhaps the state's most liberal municpality. The interloper grimaced and immediately left the table.

Subsequent to the interferer's exit, the author's friend and his colleague calmly and reasonably addressed the items they had met to discuss. Their differing political affiliations did not prevent jointly working together towards a common end.

This encounter reflected a disturbing development. Americans now exhibit strong "feelings of distrust, dislike and disdain for people who belong to the opposing political

* See p. 72 for definition.

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party" (Luscombe, 2020). Although Bidden won the electoral votes of Illinois, Trump carried 88 of the Illinois's 102 counties (Vestal, et al., 2021). Such localities often display perceptions of CRT that are polar opposites to the instruction increasingly offered in American Library Association-endorsed education for future public librarians (Leung, & Lopez-McKnight, 2021). This disjuncture between professional education and local realities will likely confront public library directors and boards of trustees in conservative communities for years to come.

Purposes of the White Paper

This essay was developed after the author received several requests from politically progressive library administrators seeking assistance for advancing inclusive public library service in conservative Republican communities. These library service locales had supported former President Donald Trump in the 2020 election. This white paper seeks to provide leaders of the library community with a relevant analysis of the implications of the conflict between the two mass movements, Social Justice and White Identity, currently vying for political control in a divided United States of America. Because this paper identifies the limits of CRT as a force for change in conservative America, it emphasizes the value of *neutrality, interlanguage*, and *pragmatism* to advance diversity, equity and inclusion in areas captured by former President Trump in 2020. The result is a demonstrated intellectual basis for pursuing social justice in library service, particularly by public libraries, when an approach openly grounded in CRT is not likely to be effective.

Name Calling and the Clash of the Social Movements

Any productive discussion of how to assist library administrators in pursuing social justice librarianship in conservative Republican or Red America will need to avoid falling into the trap of name-calling. We are experiencing what social psychologist Peter T. Colema, director of Columbia Uiversity's Difficult Conversations Lab, believes is the worst political divide in the history of the United States of America. In such a context, negativity can be counterproductive in the search for solutions. As Coleman asserts, "we are in the grip of a more than fifty year escalating trend of political, cultural, and geographical polarazation, and it is damaging our families, freindships, neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities to a degree not previously seen in our lifetime" (Coleman 2021, p. 4). When the consideration of this deep division in America is focused predominately on African-American-white relations, a strong argument can be made that a racial chasm has existed for more than four centuries (Hannah-Jones et al., 2021).

Regardless of the reality justifiably stimulating the effort, playing the "blame game" can alienate potential partners and has the problem of over-simplifying a complex reality. This arises, as Colemen observes, since causes of the deep divisions within American society are poorly understood.

> None of the usual suspects cited for this pattern of divisiveness – our neural tribal tendencies, red-versus-blue moral differences, a loneliness epidemic, a blistering pace of technological and cultural change, sensationalist media, the business model of the major internet platforms, divisive political leadership, foreign interference, and so on is really the cause of our current crisis. *All of them are* [Emphasis added] (Coleman

2021, pp. 14-15).

It is crucial to avoid premature and erroneous suggestions addressing how progressive librarians can sucessfully lead socially responsive libraries in conservative contexts. Accordingly, this paper will consider the competing forces maneuvering for conrol over American culture as mass movements. To this end, the author accepts this definition of such a mass movement: "A persistent and organized effort involving the mobilization of large numbers of people to work together to either bring about what they believe to be beneficial social change or resist or reverse what they believe to be harmful social change" (DeFronzo & Gill, 2020, p. 27). In their analysis DeFronzo and Gill identify five types of social movements:

- Innovative (liberal) movement (add something new);
- Conservative movement (keep things as they are);
- Reactionary movement (return to the past);
- Reform movement (significant change);
- Revolutionary movement (great change and structural replacement in a progressive or conservative direction) (DeFronzo & Gill, 2020, pp. 27-28).

Any classification of the natures of the Social Justice Mass Movement and the White Identity Mass Movement can suffer from subjective factors. Nevertheless, the events of recent years suggest that the Social Justice Mass Movement is basically a Reform Movement with a number of participants seeking revolutionary and immediate substantial change. The White Identity Mass Movement, as evidenced by its resistance to accepting the results of the 2020 presidential election, appears to be moving from a traditional conservative stance to embrace a Reactionary mode. Additionally, the January 6, 2021 takeover of the the U.S. Capitol Building suggests a strongly retroactive Revolutionary component.

A complicating matter related to both movements is the decline in the perception of positive Black-White relations, as Gallup revealed:

> For the second consecutive year, U.S. adults' positive ratings of relations between Black and White Americans are at their lowest point in more than two decades of measurement. Currently, 42% of Americans say relations between the two groups are "very" or "somewhat" good, while 57% say they are "somewhat" or "very" bad (Brennan 2021).

If the statistical majority of Americans perceive Black-White relations to be negative, it may well have a destructive influence on efforts to achieve socially just public library service, particularly in conservative Republican localities.

Social Justice Mass Movement Versus White Identity Mass Movement

The author spent several decades working in public, cooperative, and state library positions, rising from part time clerk to deputy state librarian. Twenty of these years were in three conservative states that voted for Donald Trump in 2020. This extended process of interacting with members of various races, social classes, and political affiliations has left this progressive author with concerns about falling into the trap of thinking in absolutes. Such an error ignores the possibility that one's conservative political opponents might have complex lives exhibiting what a progressive would see as both good and bad qualities and actions. In a report on a study of both left-wing and right-wing Amercans, Jordan Moss

described a reality where those who embrace a "black-and-white" mindset

> become less willing to question their views and become more extreme. When advocating for a political cause, this good-or-bad moral lens tends to frame people with different opinions as morally decrepit. This encourages the adoption of an us versus them worldview (Moss, 2020).

An "us versus them worldview" is precisely the wrong mental approach for progressive library staff and board members trying to champion socially just library services in a conservative Republican municipality or county. While it might be effective in Blue or Democratic contexts, it is self-defeating in Red or Republican America to argue the claim that "a gradual, liberal line of action toward justice is inadequate and that what is essential is a confrontation with a social hierarchy rooted in White Supremacy" (Leung & Lopez-McKnight 2021, p. 13). Librarians with experience in the political world learn quickly that all social movements contains adherents with differing commitments to the cause. Some are open to a level of compromise with their political opponents on issues of concern to both political camps. Others suffer from groupthink, namely a common desire not to upset the balance of a group of people, where cross boundary cooperation is impossible. The intensity of the intergroup conflict is such that group members "tend to refrain from expressing doubts and judgments or disagreeing with the [group's] consensus" (Psychology Today Staff, n.d.).

In addressing the possiblity of progress in library diversity, equity, and inclusion in the midst of the conflict between the Social Justice Mass Movement and the White Identity Mass Movement, the author will attempt to avoid such ineffective groupthink reasoning.

Understanding the Social Justice Mass Movement

Whether one agrees or disagrees with the interpretation of U.S. history advanced in Carol Anderson's challenging *White Rage* or the provocative *1619 Prioject: A New Origin Story*, it behoves library administrators and trustees to acquire a broader knowledge of the racial animosity analyzed in both works (Anderson, 2017; Hannah-Jones et al., 2021). These powerful pieces in American history revision address cultural realities too little discussed in textbooks used in conservative states such as Texas (NPR All Things Considered, 2020). For all intents and purposes these works are seminal resources for a reform movement which demonstrates occasionally revolutionary rhetoric.

The 1619 Prioject: A New Origin Story details over four hundred years of enslavement, revolts, mass murders, governmental discrimination, economic deprivation, and pervasive racism. In so doing the work argues for a total societal transformation, as well as financial reparations for America's African-American community (Hannah-Jones et al., 2021). With chapter and other contributions by historians, journalists, and poets, the work is a strong argument for change. Its contentions are perhaps best summarized by the scholar Ibram X. Kendi. In a chapter entitled "Progress" Kendi asserted, "the long sweep of America has been defined by two forward motions: one widening the embrace of Black Americans and another maintaining or widening their exclusion. The duel between these two forces represents the duel at the heart of America's racial history" (Kendi 2021, 439).

It is of interest that the term *critical race theory*, a strong contemporary object of political division (see below), does not appear in the 2021 index of *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*.

Critical Race Theory

When published in the *New York Times*, *The 1619 Project's* journalism addressing the consequences of a history of Black enslavement in America attracted criticism from some historians (GZERO Staff, 2021). However, more recent attacks by the White Identity Mass Movement on aspects of the Social Justice Mass Movement have concentrated more on CRT.

Defining Critical Race Theory (CRT)

There have been continuing arguments over the meaning of CRT (Mungo, 2021). In consequence, it seems best to provide a definition of the term from a "neutral" source. Such a useful explanation has been provided by the *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

> Critical race theory (CRT), intellectual movement and loosely organized framework of legal analysis based on the premise that race is not a natural, biologically grounded feature of physically distinct subgroups of human beings but a socially constructed (culturally invented) category that is used to oppress and exploit people of colour. Critical race theorists hold that the law and legal institutions in the United States are inherently racist insofar as they function to create and maintain social, economic, and political inequalities between whites and nonwhites, especially African Americans (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.).

Understanding the White Identity Mass Movement

In 2017 Deborah Schildkraut provided what can function as a definition for the white identity movement, "a nontrivial share of white Americans think of themselves racially and want to have white candidates on the ballot, perhaps because they fear that non-white officeholders would not understand or represent them effectively" (2017). On the surface this is a relatively non-controversial stance since "many Black Americans view political representation as a potential catalyst for increased racial equality" (Brown & Atske, 2021). How this representation is obtained is where more controversial attitudes are developed and actions undertaken.

Donald Trump and his supporters have been effective in defining contemporary training on appropriate racial relationships as a poisonous ideology within many contexts (Wallace-Wells, 2021). It was a belief that some conservatives thought required countering at the presidential level. On September 22, 2020, then President Trump issued his Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping "to promote unity in the Federal workforce, and to combat offensive and anti-American race and sex stereotyping and scapegoating" (U.S. President. Executive Order 13950, 2021). After providing a short and bowdlerized history of American progress towards equality, the Executive Order asserted that contemporary diversity training consists of promoting an ideology "rooted in the pernicious and false belief that America is an irredeemably racist and sexist country; that some people, simply on account of their race or sex, are oppressors; and that racial and sexual identities are more important than our common status as human beings and American" (U.S. President. Executive Order 13950, 2021).

Like most U.S. political controversies the matter of theorizing on race relations, whether

or not involving CRT, will end up being addressed in both voting booths and courtrooms. For now, refuting CRT is a political weapon used by conservative Republicans to boost fundraising and "win back independent and moderate white suburban voters uneasy with proposed changes to public schooling or the implication that they are to blame for the enduring inequity in American society - and must make sacrifices to rectify past wrongs" (Zurcher, 2021).

Attacks on critical race theory benefit from the fact that there is no agreed definition of what constitutes the theory. Consequently, opponents can define it in ways that are most easily attacked. Even so, there has also been a more thoughtful resistance to CRT as a legal and political lodestar for America. Former Louisiana governor and Rhodes scholar Bobby Jindal provided a non-vitriolic analysis of some of the aspects of progressive racial theorizing that are opposed by conservative Republicans It appeared in the *National Review*, America's leading journal of conservative thought. In his article he stressed that "liberals" had made microaggressions a racist issue even where those accused are not aware they are exhibiting "implicit" bias. For Jindal, an Indian American, it was a diversion from the more important issue of attacking the real and detrimental effects of individual explicit bias. Blaming society at large instead of actual racists was similarly detrimental. Attacking meritocracy, demanding reparations, pressing for mantitory corporate training, and enacting speech codes were seen as equally damaging to America (Jindal 2020). While such matters are not part of every definition of CRT, they can be made to seem so.

Unfortunately, the debate over race theory, specifically including CRT, appears to reflect the definitional confusion described by *In These Times* reporter Hamilton Nolan.

> Much of the time that we think we are talking about "issues," we are actually talking about words. One side will argue against one definition of a word, while the other side argues in favor of a different definition of a word. Each side can claim that the other is not addressing the issue, because the issue is defined differently on each side (Nolan, 2021).

Social Justice Mass Movement Reaction to Attacks on Race Theory

On September 9, 2020, Irene Mulvey President of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), responded to Trump's attack on racial justice training. She termed it both an effort to politicize efforts to deal with racism and an attack on the knowledge of experts (Mulvey, 2020).

In response to President Trump's Executive Order, the American Library Association issued an October 29, 2020 statement asserting that the association rejected his attack on diversity training as racism.

> We are painfully aware that libraries and the profession of librarianship have been – and still are – complicit in systems that oppress, exclude, and harm Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color, and deny equal opportunity to women. We assert that a commitment to learn from the painful and brutal legacies of our history is essential to the fulfillment of our promise as a country of equal rights and opportunities (ALA Statement, 2020).

Roadblocks on the Way to a Progressive America

The 2020 worldwide participation in the "Black Lives Matter" upheaval, where "never before had a Black rebellion been met with such widespread support by people of all colors, classes, and walks of life," has reinforced the preception of many that the overdue time to achieve full equality has arrived (Alexander and Alexander 2021, p. 100). However, the nation remains divided over the true nature of the effort.

A 2021 report of a national survey of 1,500 respondents by the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) showed race politics remains a substantial roadblock to rapid social equality. The survey included "1,000 white and 500 Black participants" and was led by Alexandra Filindra, UIC associate professor of political science. Among other findings the survey disclosed the following:

> Fifty-three percent of respondents do not think that the Black Lives Matter movement is anti-democratic and only cares about power, but 33% do. While race, education and gun ownership status largely shape how people think of Black Lives Matter, the deepest divide is along party lines with only 8% of Democrats *and 81% of Republicans sharing a negative view* [emphasis added] (Filindra et al., 2021, p. 4).

This division over the political purpose of Black Lives Matter (BLM) may reflect Hamilton's previously noted analysis of the confusion over words and their meaning (above). Nontheless, the UIC survey documents an enormous Democratic-Republican difference over whether BLM is primarily an effort to secure either justice or power.

In considering the practical results of this UIC survey for library administrators and trustees, the implications for action on socially just library service are crucial in conservative America. With 81% of Republicans having "a negative view" of BLM, an open adherence by librarians to both BLM and CRT is not always going to be helpful in the advancement of social justice librarianship. It may even serve to generate resistance and thereby frustrate efforts to provide excellent and relevant public library service to all racial, ethlnic, and gender segments of a conservative Republican community. As Hamilton suggests, proponents and opponents may have radically different understandings of the meaning of the shorthand definitions of anti-racist movements.

What Is Today's Climate for Achieving Social Justice Soon?

Bluntly put, public support for change in the direction of social justice is currently problematic, as David Leonhardt reported in *The New York Times* on November 30, 2021:

> When activists try to combat racism by calling it out, they often struggle to accomplish their goals. Focusing on Trump's racist behavior did not keep him from winning the presidency. The Black Lives Matter movement has mostly failed to implement its policy agenda on policing. Affirmative-action programs generally lose when they appear on the ballot — including a landslide loss in California last year, helped by opposition from many Latino and Asian voters.
>
> Race-based strategies are especially challenging in a country where living standards have stagnated in recent decades: Working-class families of all races have reason to distrust the notion that they enjoy a privileged lifestyle. No

> wonder that Steve Bannon, the far-right political figure, once said that he wanted liberals "to talk about racism every day." When they do, Bannon said, "I got 'em" (Leonhardt, 2021).

It cannot be sufficiently stressed that the reality of a intensifying national division that mirrors voting paterns has forcefully impacted both the body politic and academic researchers. Cynthia S. Wang, Director of Northwestern University's Dispute Resolution and Research Center, describes a Blue (Democrat) – Red (Republican) divide where "they're contemptuous of the other side, whom they see as 'other' and less moral – an existential threat. This rise in out-group hate is what we find so alarming" (Calvert, 2020).

For progressives the contemporary American divide is complicated by the reality that the nation also leans conservative. A 2021 Gallup Poll found "37% of Americans described their political views as moderate, 36% as conservative and 25% as liberal (Saad 2022). Additionally, party identification is now a "more meaningful source of difference than race or religion in the minds of many Americans today – particularly for Democrats" (Gest et al., 2021).

Progressive library directors and board members seeking to advance social justice in library staffing and programs in conservative America need to face the reality that total success is not likely to be achieved in the short run. In their analysis of social movements, Zwerman and Schwartz underscored that solving large social problems such as racism is a long term process, even extending over an activist's lifetime (Zwerman & Schwartz, 2021).

Advancing Library Social Justice in Conservative America

The now inevitable search on Amazon will reveal numerous works on critical race theory and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Unfortunately few, if any, of the academics and other authors have extensive professional experience as a library director in conservative Republican communities. The most relevant such anti-racist work, one that is based on public library management experience, is a first-rate pamphlet entitled *Leadership Brief: Anti-Racist Executive Leadership for Public Libraries*. Unfortunately, this document is less likely to be effective outside of progressive America. A close reading of *the Leadership Brief* reveals that its "Library Executives Leading Anti-Racism" section seems to list achievements only in Democratic-leaning locales or in increasingly progressive Canadian cities (Urban Libraries Council, n.d.).

The Urban Libraries Council advice includes instructing library directors to "call it what it is – race and racism" in efforts to overcome historic roadblocks and achieve progress in advancing DEI (Urban Libraries Council, n.d.). In conservative Republican municipalities and counties such terminology might be viewed by local leaders as signaling that library directors and boards were embracing leftist activism. It is likely to be far from the truth. Nevertheless, as with many things, human perceptions inevitably tend to overshadow realities (Taylor 2019).

Unfortunately, the potential for such incorrect accusations does exist in contexts that yet deny the validity of the 2020 presidential election. In 2021 one such attack on librarian engagement with community needs appeared in the very conservative *Alaska Watchman*. It used the planned sessions of the Alaska Library Association's annual conference to launch attacks on library neutrality at both state and national levels:

> If the topics and speakers for the upcoming Alaska Library Association Conference are any indication, local librarians are being strategically trained and recruited to advance a litany of hard-left cultural and political aims.
>
> The Alaska Library Association is a statewide nonprofit professional group that advocates for school and community libraries around the state. In recent years, however, this advocacy has taken a decidedly leftist turn – a trend seen in libraries across the nation (Davidson, 2021).

Complex realities are often simplified in the midst of intense disputations. Assertions of universally equal white privilege, for example, can be contested. Jennifer Heller reminds that members of the white population can "use their own experience to judge the validity of scholarly claims of racial privilege, because not all manifestations of racial privilege are universally accessible to whites." Membership in a well-off social class may be required to "activate certain kinds of white privilege" (Heller, 2010, p. 118).

To use a high status example, a recent study of public records revealed that "43 percent of white students admitted to Harvard University were recruited athletes, legacy students, children of faculty and staff, or on the dean's interest list – applicants whose parents or relatives have donated to Harvard." The study further noted that 75% of these white students would *not* have been admitted without falling into one of these privleged categories (NBC, 2019). As a result of such unequal white privilege, fully qualified potential students, possibly including applicants with a variety of self-acknowledged racial identities, may have lost out on a Harvard education.

How Have Library Managers Traditionally Secured Useful Advice?

Directors and trustees can regularly attend meetings of state, provencial, or national library associations. There they may routinely join informal small meetings to discuss common management, governance, and service issues. Such meetings, which often occur over meals or with liquid refreshments, are of particular value. The participants may find themselves sharing similar personnel or service problems, sometimes even involving public libraries of more or less comparable size and with similar budgets. On several occasions the author heard those involved assert that such gatherings alone were worth the conference registration fee. These off-the-record meetings, usually practical and not confined to the lastest library theories, may be considered to be the best approach to sharing ideas and solutions for addressing how to achieve progress in promoting DEI in many public library contrexts.

Short of a network of secret listeners, it would be difficult to determine if and where table discussions have been taking place over promoting library social justice in conservative locales. As is usually the case with unofficial discussions on potentially incendiary issues, no transcripts or detailed reports of such exchanges, particularly if naming names, later surface in the library and information media. It is understandably so. To avoid local blowback, accounts of currently serving directors and trustees who are working to achieve progressive ends in conservative communities would need to be published anonymously. If published in the literature, even successes might draw sideline criticism in the library professsion when directors did not not employ theories being advocated by well-compensated consultants. Unfortunately, not all consultants bring a developed public library understanding of the

sometimes complex conditions that impact progress in library social justice at the local level.

What Is Second Best? And Why Use It?

In 1852 the first edition of a fundamentally important book on academic matters entitled *The Idea of a University* appeared (Newman & Svaglic, 1982). In this legendary work, John Henry Newman provided advice useful to contemporary library directors and trustees in challenging times. According to Newman, "in a paticular instance, it might easily happen, that what is only second best is best practically, because what is actually best is out of the question" (Newman & Svaglic, 1982, p. 8). Although published long before the work of such pragmatic philosophers as William James and John Dewey this advice is a particularly pragmatic response to our current circumstances.

With CRT under attack by conservative Republicans, supporters of it and DEI may choose not to publish anything short of total support lest it be labeled as an attack on social justice librarianship itself. Consequently, readers will find little in the English language literature and web sites on how to justify, design, and secure support for non-CRT socially just library efforts. For reasons already noted above, valuable, relevant, and needed advice from still serving public library heads and trustees in conservative America is understandably missing at this time. Such may become available as directors and move on to take positions in more progressive locales, or retire.

Among the difficult to find advice is a resource developed for Symposium 1: Post-Neutrality Librarianship of the *New Librarianship Symposium Series 2021* entitled "Progressive Librarianship in'Red' America" (Crowley, 2021a). In this symposium paper the author addresses the continuing value of developing a shared language for discussing needed change, supporting library neutrality, and employing pragmatism as a planning method (Crowley, 2021a). The aim of such an approach was to improve inclusive services when CRT and other openly race-based approaches would generate resistance in conservative municipalities and counties. More recently, in "Allies, Cobelligerents, and the Political Realities of Pursuing Social Justice Librarianship in Conservative Republican Communities" (Crowley, 2023), the author addressed a progressive definition of the term "ally." This definition demands that allies must support the full spectrum of progressive demands, thereby raising a barrier to cooperation with those who might support only a part of the overdue efforts to achieve necessary change.

This essay has already noted the author's experience of serving for twenty years in increasingly responsible library positions in conservative Republican states. His claim to "second best" credentials to write on library political matters on conservative Republican local levels also includes volunteer work as a state legislative committee member and chair, as well as Federal Relations Coordinator. In both offices the author helped build coalitions that transcended political differences in their support for libraries (Crowley, 2021a, p. 4). In this political work for libraries the author found it useful to register as a Independent in order to assert the claim to both Democratic and Republican office holders that he was a member of the "Library Party." It is an approach that may no longer be feasible in what has been termed a longstanding take-no-prisoners political environment (Moss, 2012).

The Nature of the Contemporary Political Gulf

Those who have studied the incredible gulf that now separates progressive Democrats and conservative Republicans note that its contemporary political development required three critical components. According to Cynthia Wang of Northwestern University:

> The first [component] is "othering," or the tendency to view opponents as fundamentally different or alien from oneself. The second, "aversion," involves intense dislike and distrust of this other. The third is "moralization," or the perception that one's political opponents are wicked or even criminal.
>
> "It's the combination of all three that makes political sectarianism so corrosive," Wang says. "Each on its own has adverse effects, but it is the coexistence of all three that creates the poisonous cocktail of political sectarianism" (Calvert, 2020).

Even when involved in such a potentially toxic context, library heads in Red communities might achieve some degree of success in advancing social justice through a pragmatic approach based on a mutually acceptable interlanguage for discussion of how to achieve positive library change. The essential condition for library directors and boards in Republican environments for developing such an interlanguage is a willingness to create a vocabulary for negotiating progress with those on the other side of the local chasm. To do so requires an understanding of perceptions and their impact on the understanding of facts.

Subjectivity Versus Facts

The author has published a review of the literature addressing the limited role played by facts and factual arguments over political matters (Crowley, 2021b). That inquiry revealed that facts are significantly less important in political life than such "subjective means as party loyalty, self-interest, mental models, heuristics [lessons from experience or rules of thumb], and pereceptions" (Crowley, 2021b, p. 79). Such dissonance strongly influences the exploding conflict between the Social Justice and White Identify Mass Movements. In consequence, the facts contained in such a well-developed work as *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* are unlikely to influence members of the White Identity Mass Movement (Hannah-Jones et al., 2021).

Taylor On the Role of Perceptions

In considering reactions to CRT it is necessary to address the issue of human perceptions. The psychologist Jim Taylor has pointed out that

> "our perceptions influence how we focus on, process, remember, interpret, understand, synthesize, decide about, and act on reality.... The problem is that the lens through which we perceive is often warped in the first place by our genetic predispositions, past experiences, prior knowledge, emotions, preconceived notions, self-interest, and cognitive distortions" (Taylor, 2019).

Restating Taylor's observations, it is possible that library directors and trustees in Republican locales can name a number of local public library staff and community members, both progressive and conservative, whose perceptions clearly influence how they view objective facts about the "other side" in this dispute. This reality would be a local illustration

of the mega dispute that is tearing at the seams holding the American national culture together.

Political Culture Versus Library Management

While serving as a deputy state librarian in a Midwestern Republican state the author was informed about a totally unexpected occurrence. A department head in his division described to him how one of the state's relatively well-funded public libraries had hired a new library director. She came to her position from out of state with an unmatched reputation for effectiveness. Yet, she then served in her new position for a remarkably short time.

Shortly after her arrival, the new director thoroughly reviewed her library's current budget as well as its past budgets. In the process she found that the library's fiscal officer was making a salary that was immensely larger than the salary of any other staff member, including herself. While this situation was not illegal the director thought it sufficiently out of line to reflect a problem with the library's personnel and compensation policies.

At the next meeting of the library board the new director suggested that the salary of the fiscal officer be frozen until raises and cost of living increases made the salaries of other library personnel more comparable. Shortly after this proposal was put to the board, the director was no longer employed by the library. No specific reason was given for her termination. It was at this point that the now-former library director learned that the fiscal officer had spent much of her life as a Republican party activist, credited with keeping the county both conservative and Republican.

Inasmuch as the library director served at the pleasure of the board of trustees and no state laws appeared to have been broken, the state library was advised to do nothing. Following this incident the head of library development at the state library resolved to remind his staff to advise new library directors to study and comprehend the role politics plays in their library and its service community. Failure to do so could result in unintended negative consequences, particularly when taking action involving library personnel and their services.

The author has never forgotten this account of the power of some local political parties over the actions of public library boards. Now, as a tenured faculty member, he keeps it in mind while reflecting on the responsibility of faculty members in ALA-accredited programs when advising both experienced professionals and new graduates seeking employment in conservative America. When jobs could be at stake, such advice might very well stress the value of understanding one's service community before using theories and language that might not be well received locally. In particular, the intensity of the clash between the Social Justice Mass Movement and the White Identity Mass Movement should not be underestimated. The role of identity politics, which influences both social justice and white identity, is too little understood by those embracing slogans without a consideration of consequences. This was noted in a recent review:

> Criticisms of identity politics tend to center not so much on the idea that people's group identity should be important in their politics, but on ways in which identity politics has been positioned by its advocates. This includes criticism of the rigid norms of verbal behavior that are

> supposed to be used in reference to identity groups, and criticism of the assumptions that people not in particular identity groups are responsible for the negative situation of those who are (Newport, 2021).

Restated, people can resent being criticized for unintentionally using the "wrong" terminology in discussions. They can be equally annoyed at being held responsible for negative situations in which they see themselves as having had no role.

Beware of Stereotyping

Analysis conducted by the Pew Research Center for its latest political typology underscores a too little discussed reality. Data show that "the gulf that separates Republicans and Democrats sometimes obscures the divisions and diversity of views that exist within both partisan coalitions – and the fact that many Americans do not fit easily into either one" (Pew Research Center, 2021, p. 5).

The Pew typology categories explore the divergences among groups within the Democratic and Republican political parties. Setting aside independents who occasionally vote Republican, that party's coalition includes: "Faith and Flag Conservatives, Committed Conservatives, Populist Right, and Ambivalent Right categories" (Pew Research Center, 2021, p. 10). It is quite forseeable that progressive librarians can find support for some aspects of locally defined DEI in public library services within one or more of these Republican groupings. With luck, they will have influence with, or even be, government officials and other opinion leaders in a library's municipal or county service area.

In the conflicted nation that is the current U.S., acting to advance DEI without sufficent prior planning, or simply being unaware of local political currents, can leave a public library open to budget cuts and even changes in the nature of the board of trustees (Bader, 2021). For advancing social justice, the process of understanding one's local community should provide information on how well a publicized commitment to CRT would be received. If CRT is an obstacle in a community, use another critical theory. As pointed out by Roberto Frega, "pragmatism shares the main features that have made Critical Theory the most promising tool for sustaining processes of emancipation, while avoiding some of its controversial theoretical assumptions" (Frega, 2014. p. 76).

You Can Think Critically But Do Communicate Pragmatically A Pragmatic Consideration

One of the better definitions of the practical nature of pragmatism is quite short and found in the online *Cambridge Dictionary*: "the quality of dealing with a problem in a sensible way that suits the conditions that really exist, rather than following fixed theories, ideas, or rules" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

Why Pragmatism?

The author's past considerations of the value of pragmatism in advancing social justice librarianship have drawn on the valuable work of European researchers (Crowley, 2021a; Crowley, 2021b). In the process he relied heavily on the valuable analyses of Roberto Frega, a faculty member with the French National Centre for Scientific Research. Frega has summarized much of the American pragmatic tradition, particularly that of the theoretical

giant John Dewey, with the short exhortation "*don't ask for the causes, ask for the consequences* (italics in original)" (Frega, 2014, p. 68).

Certain illusionary claims made against CRT now hamper its ability to promote positive change in some conservative Republican communities. The opposition to CRT has even reached the point where state legislatures are voting to outlaw its use in education (Rashawn & Gibbons, 2021).

Rejection of the reality of systemic racism is likely to continue in much of Red America. Research now reveals that people are "putting much less time and energy into seeking accurate information about the people on the other side of the divide or on the many different challenges facing our world, choosing instead to think and feel in ways that are consisistent and conforming with our tribes" (Coleman, 2021, p. 24). In such contexts, library heads and boards in conservative Republican communities might achieve some degree of success in advancing social justice librarianship through a pragmatically sensible way based on actual conditions. Such successes will require avoiding deal-killer disputes over theories and terminology that may be unacceptable to the other parties in the discussion.

Interlanguages

The first meaning provided for interlanguage in the *Encyclopedia.com* is "a language created for international communication" (Encyclopedia.com, n.d.). For his part, the author recently restated his definition of interlanguage for the information and library professions, "a negotiated, evolving, mutually acceptable repertoire of common understandings about the world or aspects of the world viewed as important by humans seeking to communicate in a given context" (Crowley, 2021b, p. 77).

The process of developing a working interlanguage must begin with the understanding that all involved ought to be respected. If conservatives or progressives demand the other side use their terminology for talking about any library problems, everyone might as well stay home. It simply will not work.

The author recently provided a problems-based approach to developing a higher, more inclusive, level of public library service in a community:

> Service pluses or minuses are likely to vary by Red [conservative Republican] communities. One proven approach to identifying local service consequences and any necessary changes would be for community planners to develop a listing of which programs the planners believe local taxpayers can reasonably expect their library to provide. The listing should allow for the use of different delivery systems in providing such services. This approach, which is designed to minimize finger-pointing and a subsequent planning breakdown, can be effective in determing if certain community segments, specifically including BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), are being adquately served (Crowley, 2021a, p. 21).

In preparing for this sort of effort the author recommends a reading of Peter T. Coleman's *The Way Out: How to Overcome Toxic Polarization* (2021). This well-researched work uses more of a popular than academic style as it addresses such factors as effective outside assistance in the necessary discussions for change, the complexity of major community

problems that take time to address, and the worth of smaller groups sharing an interest in community betterment to problem solving (Coleman, 2021).

Library Neutrality

Openly proclaiming that the public library is not neutral without expecting negative blowback in conservative America is potentially self-defeating. It represents an invitation to obstruct efforts to advance socially responsible public library staffing and service. In a time of intense national division, members of the White Identity Mass Movement might see such a declaration as demonstrating that a community or county's valued library has been taken over by radicals seeking to spread a negatively defined version of CRT. In certain locales, that could lead to the appointment or election of a more conservative board of trustees and the hiring of a less progressive library director. Such developments would not bode well for achieving overdue diversity, equity, and inclusion via library reforms.

From a pragmatic stance the story of the development of public library neutrality can be told differently, It can be seen, particularly in the last half-century, as a tale of fault correction and increasing achievement in the effort to provide all segments of a community with the neutral goal of excellent services. As with all things human it is an incomplete story. However, library history has demonstrated how public libraries, cognizant of past failures and present needs, increasingly demonstrate a willingness to change in positive directions. They add branches, put bookmobiles on the road, offer books by mail or electronically, create hotspot lending programs, hire teachers to help with homework assignments, and even provide evening story hours for the children of working adults.

Money can be an indicator of support for public libaries. The fact that public libraries won 90% of the elections in both Blue and Red states on funding during the incredibly divisive 2020 presidental election demonstrates that much of the American public, regardless of political affiliation, currently trusts its public libraries (Ford, 2020).

The New Rules Are the Old Rules Restated for Public Library Directors and Trustees in Conservative Republican America

The new rules for public library directors in communities predominately influenced by the Social Jusatice Mass Movement or the White Identity Mass Movement are very much like the old rules, only more so. The need to understand a community's culture, even if one strongly disagrees with it, is fundamentally important.

As already noted, the fundamental difference between progressive and conservative locales becomes clear when one understands how the same words are interpreted differently. For example, in progressive communities the concept of "library neutrality" can be a negative to be either openly doubted or even attacked. In conservative locales it is more likely to be defined as a reasonable ideal, since the public library is supported by all taxpayers in the community. Library directors need to understand which definition applies in their service areas. The matter of critical race theory or CRT can be defined as truth in progressive areas while being characterized as false and even unAmerican in conservative environments.

All public library directors and trustees need to know how effective openly embracing CRT would be in their service areas in the necessary effort to advance social justice in library services. If use of the theory would be counterproductive, a library director will

want to take another approach that would avoid language a dominant local culture would find as a trigger for negative reaction. Adopting the pragmatic "don't ask for the causes, ask for the consequences" could highlight what needs to be done without attempting to name and shame influential individuals and groups. While this could be less emotionally satisfying, it could result in better long run outcomes for library social justice.

The necessary effort to advance DEI in public library services is not going to be easy. As observed by the psychologist Peter Coleman, who also directs Columbia University's Difficult Conversation Lab:

> When faced with a high degree of intergroup (red versus blue) threat, frustration, and enmity, most of us fall back on some of the deeper rules we have developed to cope with spikes of risk amd uncertainity. Under these conditions, we automatically move to simplify, essentialize, close ranks, defend, blame, and attack. In other words we move from relatively more open, curious, nuanced, and accessible modes of experience and action to more closed, certain, and defensive modes. We are virtually hardwired to do so (Coleman, 2021, p. 213).

To minimize the likelihood of negative developments, public library programs on challenging or emerging local issues should avoid simplistic "pro or con" debates. Such types of public programs are likely to be a barrier to solving very complex issues. They tend only to reinforce the existing beliefs of both participants and their audiences (Coleman, 2021). Instead, libraries should consider roundtables communicating along the lines of "What Are the Necessary Components of Inclusive Library Service for Our Community?" or "Our Homschooling Numbers Are Growing. What Do the Parents of these Students Need from Their Public Library?"

Avoiders, Martyrs, or Achievers

In the end, public library directors and trustees in conservative Republican areas dominated by the White Identity Mass Movement have three choices for future action.

The first choice was identified by pragmatic researcher Patricia M. Shields. It is the route most often taken by administrators in the public sector when facing change —duck and hope to avoid attacks by "powerful interest groups, employees, clients, politicians" (Shields, 1993, p. 34).

The second choice is to publicly stress that one's library has never really been neutral. Instead, it has operated in a manner that has been inherently discriminatory in hiring staff, developing collections, and providing services. This approach may succeed in transforming the direction of a community's library program where its Red status is only slightly Pink. Alternatively, the results may resemble what happened when that new director (see above p. 70) discerned that the high salary paid to her library's fiscal head was out of step with best personnel policies.

The third approach is to reread and act upon the definition of pragmatism offered in this paper – "the quality of dealing with a problem in a sensible way that suits the conditions that really exist, rather than following fixed theories, ideas, or rules" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Inherent in this approach would be the need to identify and recruit as library planners, local conservative Republicans, progressive Democrats, and undecided Independents who believe in the aphorism "You have to pay your civic rent." Such individuals

are seeking ways to pay back their community for its past personal and professional support. As such, to some degree they may be willing to join in the work to make possible quality and individually relevant library service open to all community members through a variety of means.

Such an approach would obviously need to develop an interlanguage where planners with different political commitments agree on the meaning of the terms used in their discussions of the goals and aims of their public library service. This effort would have to be strongly pragmatic. Participants would need to be willing to throw away every theory, including the author's pragmatism, that gets in the way of a collaborative approach towards socially just library staffing and service improvement.

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Author

Bill Crowley is a professor, librarian, researcher, junior grade folklorist, and a writer who worked for decades in New York, Alabama, Indiana, and Ohio libraries and library organizations as everything from part-time clerk and public relations consultant to library cooperative head and deputy state librarian. As of this writing Bill authored fifty-five (55) articles/book chapters and two books, while editing a third. He has a BA in history, MS in library service, MA in English/folklore, and PhD in higher education. At present, Bill's writing consists of articles for library and information studies practitioners in a challenging time, and a growing commitment to fiction. Although Bill had planned to devote the rest of his writing time to fiction, requests for assistance from librarians trying to provide library inclusive service in a divided America has diverted him to research and to publishing. The author's paper, titled "Allies, Cobelligerents, and the Political Realities of Pursuing Social Justice Librarianship in Conservative Republican Communities," published in *Library Philosophy and Practice*, won the 2023 Annual Library Juice Paper Contest. It was deemed by the prize jury to be 'inspiring, hopeful, and timely.'"

Funding Our Priorities: Comparisons of Public Library Funding and Services with Other Sectors in Post-COVID America

A.J. MILLION
JENNY BOSSALLER

ABSTRACT

Libraries generally have high levels of public support and satisfaction—they are seen as a valuable and trusted part of local government and communities. For example, a Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2016 found that 84% of American adults said that public libraries were "very" or "somewhat" important to their communities. In addition, 90% of respondents said that libraries were important for children and families, and 86% said that they were important for providing access to technology and the Internet. In comparison, other parts of local government, such as city hall, schools, and parks, received a lower level of support and satisfaction. The survey also found that Americans had a high level of trust in their local libraries. More than 80% of respondents said that they had a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of trust in their local library.

Yet, libraries are often put in the position of justifying investment in them, despite providing a wide range of community services in addition to the usual library services and receiving far less funding compared to many other public sector areas. Coming through the pandemic, and with unprecedented support for state and municipal budgets provided in the *CARES Act* and *American Rescue Plan*, governments now have surpluses for the first time since the 1990s. But what will happen to municipal and state budgets if or when there is a return to economic austerity? How can libraries better demonstrate their value to obtain additional funding from that surplus, especially if decision-makers face tough questions about local spending allocations?

In this report, we attempt to tackle these questions by 1) comparing library budgets to budgets of other public services, especially policing; 2) discussing national trends in library resource allocation; and 3) discussing emerging, non-traditional library services and their budgets.

Policymakers continually debate about the priorities of states and municipalities to fund public libraries, education, and the social safety net relative to public safety, including police and sheriff services. This report presents a point-in-time, multi-state snapshot of public library expenditures, staffing, and revenue data and compares that snapshot with other local government agencies. We compare state and local government investment in public libraries to other local services in fiscal years (FY) 2018 and 2019. We chose to examine these pre-COVID years because they paint a picture of municipal funding before the pandemic and without the significant infusion of federal funding from pandemic relief and recovery programs. Data describing these years is characteristic of an economy similar to the past 10 –

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Core vs. Discretionary Framework for Library Funding

15 years, with low inflation rates.

Some public libraries provide "core" services to their patrons, while others function as providers of "discretionary" services. Core governmental services refer to the basic services that a municipality is responsible for providing to its residents *as required by law* (e.g., waste removal, voting services, and K–12 public education). Note that contracted service providers might provide some core services. Additionally, core services are supported by mandatory government spending; mandatory expenditures are automatic and are included in federal, state, and municipal budgets. In contrast, discretionary services are optional, and they sometimes augment core services. Discretionary services are generally funded with discretionary spending allocated through appropriations processes.

Note that there is some overlap between core and discretionary services, as well as mandatory and discretionary spending – elected officials at all levels of government must interpret what is core, mandatory, and discretionary in cases of ambiguity. This means public services do not always fit into neat or well-defined categories.

Library Expenditures vs. Other Government Services

Increasingly, public libraries deliver services that support or enhance the work of other government and/or nonprofit agencies, and many of these services were created to fill a void when existing services were unavailable or inadequate. Below, we compare state and local government investment in public libraries to different categories of public services[1] (13 sectoral categories from the U.S. Census Bureau's *Annual State and Local Government Finances Survey*); *Appendix 1* lists and defines each class we examined.[2]

Table 1 maps individual library services with other government sectors that have a stake in the outcomes of these library services. The services that libraries provide are generally

Library service	Identified sectoral overlap
Computer and internet access	Other governmental administration
Materials and programming for young children and families	Elementary and secondary education: Other education
Social Services	Public welfare; Health
Supporting local leaders	Financial administration; Other governmental administration
After-school STEM education programming	Elementary and secondary education; Other education
Healthcare access	Public welfare; Hospitals, Health
Crisis and disaster management	Police protection; Fire protection; Other governmental administration
Access to information for immigrants, English-language learners, and people with disabilities	Other education; Other public welfare
Libraries of "things"	Other and unallocable

Table 1. Overlap between discussed library services and other state and local service areas

[1]Our analysis excludes U.S. territories and the District of Columbia.
[2]The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) *Public Library Survey* (PLS) reports data for federal fiscal years, but the *Survey of State and Local Government Finances* is based on local fiscal years.

considered discretionary ones, but we argue that municipal decision-makers ought to treat them as core services when they are foundational to community needs.

Despite the core and discretionary services they provide, libraries receive comparatively little money next to nearly all other sectors of services funded by U.S. state and local governments. In 2019, spending on police was $123 billion ($123,278,878,000). Fire protection totaled $55 billion ($55,248,918,000), despite being a significant beneficiary of volunteer labor in many locations. Libraries spent $13.3 billion ($13,313,607,233) that same year (2019).[3] Average per capita spending by state and local governments on police was $380.66, fire protection $170.60, and libraries $41.11.[4]

We found similar trends in education spending. In 2019, state and local spending on higher education and elementary and secondary education totaled $311 billion ($311,455,794,000) and $718 billion ($718,262,767,000), respectively. Spending on other forms of education, such as professional and non-school-based training programs, totaled $62 billion ($62,696,969,000). Per capita, higher education spending was $956.46, K–12 expenditures were $2,205.75, and "Other" education spending was $192.53. *Figure 1* shows the small scale of overall library spending compared to K–12 education, higher education, other education, policing, and fire protection categories.

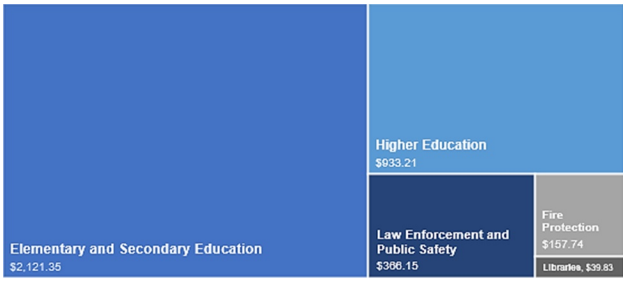

Figure 1. State and local government per capita spending, 2019

Survey data in 2019 revealed equally similar trends in the areas of healthcare ($112,440,957,000; $345.30 per capita), hospitals ($211,479,875,000; $649.44 per capita), public welfare benefits ($745,837,989,000; $2,290.43 per capita), and housing and community development ($57,235,193,000; $175.76 per capita). Even a mundane area like governmental administration (financial, $49,920,770,000, $153.30 per capita; general $37,755,625,000, $115.95 per capita, and undefined services, $140,332,453,000, $430.95 per capita) was exceptionally well-funded.

State and Local Government Revenue Sources

The sectors described above receive funding from a variety of government sources. Following is a look at where the funds for libraries, policing, fire protection, higher education, and secondary education come from. Sectoral funding portfolios vary quite a bit, and funding portfolios may shape what each sector "counts" as core or discretionary services.

[3]Spending on all sectors, except libraries, comes from the U.S. Census Bureau and excludes capital expenditures. Library data is from the PLS.
[4]Used POPUSTATE variables from the *PLS* to calculate per capita spending in all following figures.

Note that we used published data from the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) *Public Library Survey* (PLS), the *American Community Survey* (ACS), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's *Uniform Crime Reports* (UCR). One limitation to comparing these data sources is that they vary by reporting period and sampling method.

Public Libraries

Voters and taxpayers are generally under- or ill-informed about the ways that local public libraries are funded. Fully 60% of voters incorrectly believe that library funding comes from non-local sources (Rosa, 2018, p. 11). In reality, public libraries in the U.S. are funded through local tax revenue, state and federal funding, private grants, charitable donations, and other sources. See *Table 2* for a breakdown of funding sources in 2018. Traditionally, libraries have had significant latitude in choosing the services they deliver and how, but exceptions exist. In the 2000s, for instance, Bertot et al. (2006) pointed out that public libraries providing reference assistance for online e-government services (without receiving additional funding) amounts to an unfunded mandate. Jaeger et al. (2013) documented that while federal aid to libraries is limited, this funding has been used as leverage to determine what services libraries provide and how.

Source	Total	Percent
Local Tax Revenue	$11.9 billion	85%
State Sources	$935 million	6.7%
Federal Sources	$45.8 million	0.3%
Other Sources	$981 million	7%
Total Revenue	$13.87 billion	
Operating Expendituress	$12.85 billion	
Capital Outlays, Debt Servicing, and Rainy-Day Funds	~$1 billion	

Table 2. 2018 Revenues and Expenditures for Public Libraries

Policing, Fire Protection, and Higher and Secondary Education

Funding for public safety and education in the U.S. are also highly local, although, in education, there tends to be more aid provided by state and federal governments. The IMLS PLS demonstrates that 85% of funding for public libraries comes from local taxes. The same is generally true for public safety. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) reports that local governments typically provide most of the funding for fire services in the United States. In 2019, local governments provided about 87% of fire department funding, with the remaining funding coming from state and federal sources. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), in 2019, federal grants made up an average of 3.5% of total state and local law enforcement expenditures.

Funding formulas for K–12 education are significantly different than they are for public safety and libraries, which brings with it debates about what services should be provided (e.g., what should and should not be taught). In general, the funding for K–12 education comes from a combination of local, state, and federal sources. The percentage of funding from each source varies depending on the state and the school district. According to the

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) most recent data available (2017–2018), 44% of K–12 education funding came from state sources, about 14% came from federal sources, and about 42% came from local sources. The Pew Charitable Trusts report that in 2017, federal funding paid 43.4% of higher education spending, states paid 48.8%, and local governments paid 7.8%. In education, the proportion of funding sources varies widely depending on the location and the specific state. Some states have a higher proportion of state funding, while others rely more heavily on local funding. Federal and state funding in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the funding ratios.

Spending Priorities

Although public services can be classified as "core" and "discretionary," and funding that supports these services is "mandatory" or "discretionary," the end result reflects state, local, and federal government priorities. Libraries must always justify investment in them relative to investments made in other public sector areas. Policing is one domain in which this negotiation may occur, and below, we provide an example of how existing priorities can and should be questioned by librarians and their advocates.

To compare investment in libraries with policing, it is necessary to understand that neither libraries nor police covers the entire population of every state. Acknowledging this, we reviewed statistics about the number of police and public safety personnel in individual states compiled by the FBI through its 2019 Uniform Crime Reporting program, in addition to our comparison of sectoral spending earlier. The UCR does not measure the cost of policing directly, but data the FBI collects can be used in conjunction with the ACS to estimate the cost of policing, including per capita costs and the ratio of staff to populations.

State and local governments invest significantly more resources in public safety and policing than libraries, as we detail in prior sections. Crime is a concern in many areas, but nationally, crime has declined since the 1990s (Gramlich, 2020). The data we examined in *Table 4* show that the per capita number of law enforcement employees was much higher than library staff. For every librarian in the U.S., there are seven police officers. Combined with the expenditure data we analyzed earlier, a coherent argument can be made that nationally, the U.S. overinvests in public safety: the Vera Institute (n.d.) demonstrates that policing dominates city budgets. An analysis by the *Washington Post* suggests that over the past 60 years, more spending on police has not necessarily resulted in reduced crime (Bump, 2020). Whether "defunding the police" is a wise course of action for public policy is beyond the scope of our analysis, but debates regarding funding priorities in this area illustrate a broader point – library funding and funding for other government services should ideally be tied to community needs.

Libraries and Police - Per Capita Expenditures		Public Libraries - IMLS		Police 2018 - FBI UCR, Table 74	
Libraries*	$39.57	Service Population for 2018***	323,479,676	Service Population for 2018****	287,702,296
Police**	$412.93	Staff	142,308	Staff	975,305
Libraries spending per employee*	$89,243	Ratio of Population to Staff	2,273 to 1	Ratio of Population to Staff	294 to 1
Police spending per employee**	$121,808				

*ACS and IMLS PLS
** ACS and UCR
***Includes all 50 states plus Washington, D.C.
****Reporting agencies only

Table 4. Library and Police Staffing and Associated Expenditure Comparisons

The State of Library Funding and Support

Public library requirements to provide specific library services (or access to other services) are found in state laws. Communities are not required to maintain libraries by federal law, but almost all areas of the U.S. have library services. Public libraries' ability to deliver core and supplemental services ultimately depends on their ability to hire and retain a skilled workforce, as well as consistent investment in libraries.

Our analysis revealed that the per-capita number of library staff has shrunk in the past decade. In 2012, public libraries employed 136,564 staff, and this number increased by 5% to 144,067 in 2019; meanwhile, from 2012–2020, the U.S. population grew by 9.6%. Explanations for library staffing levels not keeping pace with population growth include retirements, hiring freezes, automation, and decreased library staff spending. Meanwhile, library employee compensation is lower than many public-sector peers (in 2019, per-employee police spending was $123,494.87, compared to $92,412.61 for libraries). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022) predicts an increased number of librarians hired in the next decade, but whether this occurs depends on resource availability and a willingness by libraries to hire.

Data from the past decade also calls into question if increased funding is sufficient for libraries to meet their staffing, and thus their service, needs. Libraries reported increased revenue from 2012–2019; per-capita library operating income grew too, and in both cases, the increase was faster than inflation. Library operating revenues in 2019 totaled $14,244,029,079, compared to $13,313,607,233 in expenditures. Despite running surpluses and increased funding, library staff levels remained flat despite population growth because many created rainy-day funds. According to the 2018 Budget Survey by *Library Journal*, libraries also spent money to give raises when they did invest in staff (Peet, 2018).

The National Conference of State Legislatures (2019) describes rainy-day funds as mechanisms for governments to weather crises. The Tax Policy Center (2020) reports that only three states do not require rainy-day fund payments, but many library administrators maintain them to protect their institutions. We cannot explain why libraries did not hire

more staff from 2012–2019, but conservative spending was a factor. In 2019 alone, public libraries saved $930,421,846, which may have helped them weather crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unit	2012	2016	2017	2018	2019
Per capita library staff					
Library service area	1:2,327.76	1:2,368.60	1:2,356.47	1:2,354.88	1:2,331.91
State	1:2,348.37	1:2,352.98	1:2,342.27	1:2,343.48	1:2,324.75
Per capita library operating revenue					
Library service area	$36.11	$39.29	$40.49	$41.67	$42.81
State	$35.03	$39.10	$40.23	$41.29	$42.37
Per capita library operating expenditures					
Library service area	$34.14	$37.26	$37.96	$38.82	$40.60
State	$33.90	$36.37	$37.54	$38.92	$39.90

Table 5. National library statistics (per capita basis), 2012, 2016–2019

Funding Traditional and Emerging Library Activities

Over the past two decades, public libraries have weathered three storms:

- First, libraries dealt with economic austerity following the 2007–2009 "Great Recession." In 2012, 57% of libraries reported flat or decreasing operating budgets, and 40% of state libraries said that states had cut aid to public libraries during the previous three years (ALA, 2012a). IMLS also reported increased demand for library services, despite libraries operating with fewer resources (ALA, 2012b).
- Second, libraries have navigated disruptive changes to their business model as publishers, technology companies, and the media industry digitized content and distributed it via online platforms. Libraries also provided content online, and some have become publishers (Moulaison, 2016), but their impact and reach were limited, either by competition from for-profit entities or publishers constraining libraries' lending of e-books (Neary, 2019).
- A third and still emerging challenge is in adapting to COVID-influenced changes to patron behaviors. In many places, patron visits, in-person circulations, and program attendance have not recovered to pre-pandemic levels. While libraries report more digital and online use, statistics do not show that these types of engagements are taking the place of all missing in-person activities (Chrastka, 2023).

Shifts in patron behaviors predate the pandemic, but like so many societal changes over the past two decades, that shift appears to have accelerated. As a result, research increasingly documents a transformation in public libraries, which now offer services that cement their role as part of the social infrastructure. Transformations in libraries are a direct response to challenges they have encountered since 9-11.

Today, libraries provide many services that have *emerged organically in response to unmet*

community needs not filled by other agencies or institutions that are government-funded but which would logically fulfill the need. These include free access to the Internet (Becker et al., 2010), social services (Wahler et al., 2020), and after-school programming (Moellman & Tillinger, 2004). Perhaps for this reason, in 2017, 55% of American voters viewed the library as an essential public institution (Rosa, 2018). In 2019, a Gallup poll found that "the most common cultural activity Americans engage in by far" is visiting the library (Zalulsky, 2020).

Despite libraries' success and popularity, they often receive little funding compared to other sectors of government (as we demonstrated earlier). Libraries' reliance on local funding constrains the services they provide in proportion to municipal tax bases, and library advocates must simultaneously justify funding, sometimes at the expense of other government services.

Nontraditional Library Services

Following are some examples of services many libraries provide and where they overlap with other sectors of local government identified in the *Annual Survey of State and Local Government Finances*. This list of services (initially provided in *Table 1*) is not comprehensive. Instead, it is meant to highlight some of the offerings that public libraries have developed, either in-house or through collaborative efforts with other agencies or nonprofits that extend services far beyond what the public might consider traditional public library services.

Free computer and internet access

For years, researchers have documented how public libraries offer internet access to the public, enabling citizens to engage with online government services (Jaeger & Fleischman, 2007; Bertot, 2010). This has been called an unfunded mandate (Bertot et al., 2006) because it is expected, yet libraries never received increased federal funding to become e-government service providers.

ALA's 2014 Digital Inclusion Survey (https://www.ala.org/tools/research/digitalinclusion) found that nearly all U.S. public libraries offer internet access, technology training, learning programs, summer reading programs, and assistance to patrons in completing online government forms (Becker et al., 2010). In 2020, the Public Library Association found more than half of public libraries report circulating technology (e.g., tablets) for offsite use. More than 93% of libraries offer high-demand digital collections, over 88% offer formal or informal digital literacy programming, and more than one in five provide classes or informal help related to coding, computer programming, robotics, and 3D printing.

Materials and programming for young children and families

One of the main focuses of public libraries' services since the early 1900s has been on young children and families. Libraries have continued to evolve and improve services for young children as they incorporate recommendations from researchers about early literacy and child development. For instance, Family Place Libraries is "a nationwide network of children's librarians who embrace the fact that literacy begins at birth" ("About Us," Family Place Libraries, 2022). They offer a model for transforming U.S. public libraries into "welcoming, developmentally appropriate early learning environments for very young children, their parents, and caregivers," concentrating on multiple aspects of child

development. As part of this initiative, trained specialists also develop library and outreach programs for low-income families by working with health, education, and human services agencies ("What is a Family Place Library," 2022).

Social services

Libraries hiring or partnering with social workers has also become common in recent years (Wahler et al., 2020). Public librarians frequently help people find health and wellness resources and might refer people to addiction counseling. Additionally, as the opioid crisis spread, librarians saw a need for more training in that area (Feuerstein-Simon et al., 2022). Libraries also serve as warming and cooling centers. Additional examples of library-based social services include coordinating outreach on behalf of homeless shelters and organizing life-skills training programs for nonviolent criminal offenders (State of America's Libraries, 2014, p. 8–9).

Most libraries cannot deliver social services at scale. A 2021 survey of libraries in the southeastern U.S. found that only 12.5% employed a social worker. Half of the libraries that did not employ a social worker said limited funding prevented them from doing so (Gross & Latham, 2021).

Support for local policymakers and entrepreneurs

Libraries in Chattanooga (TN) and Boston (MA) each serve as hubs for their city's data, demonstrating that they help citizens and policymakers engage in region-wide planning. Local business owners also use this data to start businesses (ALA, 2019, p. 24). For instance, rural libraries in Tennessee developed a *Public Library Small Business Toolkit* that provides resources to citizens about financing startups and other information about running a small business (Mehra, Bishop, & Partee, 2017).

After-school programming, tutoring, STEM, and advanced technologies

Children flock to libraries after school, and public libraries often collaborate with local schools to improve resource development to support curricula. Libraries might host after-school tutors and have extensive after-school educational programs. Learning environments have continued to evolve to keep up with emerging technologies, and libraries have responded by creating "maker spaces to promote science and technology learning" (ALA, 2019, p. 13).

The American Library Association's (ALA) "Libraries Ready to Code" initiative provides a more concrete example of how libraries support after-school learning, especially as it relates to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Recently, this program awarded 250 libraries money to "plan and implement [software] coding activities" (ALA, 2019, p. 22).

The Young Adult Library Services Association's Future Ready Project also brings staff from small and tribal libraries to learn how to create resources and programs for middle-school teens, especially for youth in low-income families. The Memphis Public Library offers sound and video production labs, a maker space, a robotics lab, an art studio, and more in its two-story teen space, Cloud901 (Memphis Public Library, 2022). Such initiatives can be expensive but offer an incredible array of resources that enrich the lives of youth.

Access to healthcare

Caring for one's body includes activities that range from researching diseases, diets, and exercise strategies to participating in yoga and self-defense classes. Patrons can do all these things in public libraries. For example, the Libraries Connecting You to Coverage initiative helps people apply for health insurance through the *Affordable Care Act*, and hundreds of libraries participate (ALA, 2020). Additionally, many more libraries have configured spaces that patrons can use for telehealth services (e.g., kiosks, private rooms, etc.), sometimes involving partnering with healthcare organizations or providers. Riggs (2022) explains that this is a valuable service in rural areas because patrons often travel long distances to appointments that they might instead complete online.

A hub for disaster and crisis management

In the aftermath of both natural and man-made disasters, many libraries become "ad hoc Disaster Recovery Centers" (Stricker, 2019, p. 11). Because public libraries are technology and information hubs, they provide a space for communities to gather and for volunteer groups to organize. Libraries also provide the means and assistance for community residents to file Federal Emergency Management Agency forms and insurance claims (Bishop & Veil, 2013). Libraries acting as disaster hubs is infrequent, but it is essential in times of crisis, and they must have a resilient infrastructure in place to be effective (Scholl & Patin, 2014).

Access for immigrants, English-language learners, and people with disabilities

The American Dream Starts @ Your Library initiative, funded with a one-time grant from Dollar General, supports adult education and literacy programming for English language learners. In 2016, ALA reported that "more than 160 public libraries have received grants since the program's inception in 2007" (ALA, 2016, pp. 15–16). This program is just one example of how libraries often expand services to meet the needs of ethnic or cultural minority groups.

Many libraries also work to meet the unique needs of people with disabilities. The Maryland State Library's Deaf Culture Digital Library, for example, offers professional training on the topic to librarians around the state. Brooklyn (NY) and Bloomfield Township (MI) have acquired "adaptive toys with large buttons for easy activation" and "message communication devices that can record answers to questions… so that children who are nonverbal can participate actively in programs" (ALA, 2020, p. 23). Finally, public libraries often co-locate services as they try to make other public services more accessible. The Chicago Public Library has partnered with the Chicago Housing Authority to open three new city-owned facilities that combine housing developments and libraries. Likewise, the District of Columbia Public Library is working to "create a city within a city" with room for municipal agencies to "provide services like D.C. Health Link with a physical office space within the library for direct connection with city residents" (ALA, 2020, p. 26).

Libraries of "things" and household object repair

Beyond the various services described above, increasingly, libraries report developing collections of "things" to check out, such as career clothing for job interviews, cake pans, fishing poles, musical instruments, blood pressure monitoring kits, and camping equipment (Darty, 2018; ALA, 2020). Their libraries might include seldom-used or bulky items, or they might provide the opportunity for people try out a new hobby. Many libraries also collect

seeds, allowing patrons to trade heirloom seeds or supply them with commercial seeds (Peekhaus, 2018). Some libraries provide garden spaces.

An increasingly popular activity in public libraries is the repair event (Cottrell, 2017). These are often run through partnerships with repair experts, like electricians and sewists, who bring in the tools to fix items while they teach patrons how to fix household objects and other items. Repair events keep broken but fixable items out of the trash and landfills while saving people money.

Guidance for Delivering Collaborative Services

Between 2000 and 2021, the New York State Library policies shifted from supporting or building electronic collections to leveraging library spaces for services and programs (Yamagishi, Koizumi, & Widdersheim, 2022). These services and programs addressed emerging societal problems, much like those addressed by the eight areas of library services presented above.

Given the many societal, technological, and economic changes of the past several decades, it stands to reason that libraries are increasingly delivering nontraditional services to meet community needs. Libraries offer spaces ideal for "one-stop shops," where users can complete government tasks (e.g., apply for passports, file taxes), apply for jobs, pick up a book or a movie, take a class, and enjoy people-watching. However, funds are needed to provide those services; financial support from other state and local government entities could fund space and salaries. Where libraries fill a gap or meet a need, services should not become unfunded mandates or expected responsibilities just because public libraries exist to support community needs.

Collaborative governance models provide guidance for libraries about how to procure resources, which is especially relevant given that funding allocations to other government sectors dramatically exceed those made to libraries and much of the work public libraries do aligns or overlaps with work in these sectors.

Collaborative governance is defined as "a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets" (Ansell & Gash, 2008, p. 444). This approach describes networks or coalitions of actors working together. Most importantly, research examining collaborative governance also documents what makes collaborations effective and beneficial to all parties involved and the people they serve.

The strength of a collaborative governance model comes from its focus on involving multiple stakeholders in the decision-making process and the implementation of public policies. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations have shifted to virtual meetings and collaboration, which significantly flattens access to government and creates new transparency in decision making. With a focus on stakeholder engagement, collaborative governance can emphasize the importance of engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including community members, non-governmental organizations, and business stakeholders. Collaborative governance is increasingly employed to address social inequalities to develop inclusive policies that benefit all members of society.

Ansell and Gash present six criteria for collaborations (p. 445):

- Public organizations like libraries should initiate collaborations and set agendas.
- Participants should include community residents.
- Decision making should be engaging.
- Collaborations should be formal.
- Decision making ought to be by consensus.
- Collaborations should focus on policy-related issues like improving community health or literacy.

The takeaway from these criteria is that collaborators should try to work together to solve shared problems, which involves formally pooling resources and knowledge and "sharing discretion" for decision-making (Donahue & Zeckhauser, 2012).

Why and when libraries deliver nontraditional services will likely always depend on localized needs and unpredictable circumstances. Collaborating with other government agencies, however, provides a critical method to reach more people and extend services, simultaneously sidestepping challenging debates at the federal, state, and local levels about what should be a "core" or "discretionary" activity. Libraries offer an ideal space to deliver many public services, such as serving as an informational hub for social services and government services, but the city or county could provide funding for the staff to deliver the services. Similarly, libraries are providing spaces for telehealth, but the space could be subsidized by the health department. Space and staff to support local entrepreneurial activity might be sponsored and staffed part-time by the small business association, and spaces for tutors could be supplied for a small fee, or with some funding from the education department. Many libraries engage in creative funding, but not all do, and overextending staff and space leads to unrealistic expectations as well as staff burnout. To ensure libraries are positioned for the future, we recommend careful attention paid to their services and the potential to fund or support new services. Other state and local entities possess the resources to augment these services through collaborations.

Conclusions

Ideally, library funding and funding for other government services should be tied to services provided and community need for them. Yet library funding is often disproportionately low when compared to sectors providing the same or related services.

Policing, for example, is particularly well-funded compared to libraries, but research shows that more spending on police does not necessarily decrease crime. Other public sectors are significantly better funded than libraries as well: Elementary, higher, and secondary education; hospitals; health; public welfare; financial administration; and other governmental administration categories receive a significant amount of public funds. Whatever the cause of these disparities, spending in these areas are a function of state, federal, and local policy priorities reflected in mandatory and discretionary spending decisions. However, we also found the services libraries provide frequently overlap with work done in these and other sectors.

Anecdotal and professional reports suggest that public libraries increasingly fill gaps in social services (Rosen, 2020) and meet other community needs (Pew, 2013) in addition to their traditional roles. It is well-documented that the U.S. social safety net is a patchwork of systems – barring an effort to fill this gap, libraries will likely continue acting as stopgap

community resource centers, and their work will continue to support "core" work in other domains. Funding models by themselves do not address community needs, so needs for library services will likely continue to grow.

So, how then, can libraries position themselves for the future? Answering this question is difficult, but based on our analysis, we conclude that they need continued integration with other social services and a commitment to collaborative governance for shared services to maximize impact. This integration is called for based on the overlap in services we identified and existing funding disparities.

It is too soon to say whether states and municipalities are likely to return to an era of austerity comparable to the period between 2000 and 2020. Pushing for more direct support from states or the federal government may help libraries deliver services independently, but this will be unlikely to occur if austerity returns. Thus, we conclude that it falls to individual districts to communicate why investment in libraries matters enough to reallocate funding, or procure it from partner sectors, such as education. We also conclude that these same libraries must address questions about internal spending prioritization because, despite increased revenue over the past decade, libraries hired few staff who could provide needed services.

Some public services will always receive more support than others, so librarians should be willing to engage within and outside of government to draw attention to aligning government spending portfolios with community needs. Even among libraries within states, there are disparities and differing needs. Different local economies all have different resources, federal funding cannot address all disparities – so, absent increased aid, it falls to local librarians to identify how to bridge gaps. Future research should attempt to examine the impact public libraries have on communities, which will open the door to potentially important decisions about adopting new models of library funding justified by the role of community centers that libraries increasingly play. We believe looking at state funding and support models may provide paths forward for librarians to position their institutions.

Topics for Future Inquiry

Based on our analysis, we identified four future topics of inquiry:

1. How does the number of public library staff over the past decade compare against population growth? Against users?
2. Are public libraries able to produce substantial savings to contribute to rainy-day funds?
    - How equipped are libraries for crises?
    - What differences exist between libraries in different states/cities/etc.?
3. What models of local and state funding and other funding mechanisms are most effective for public libraries, and why?
4. Research should also look at the impact public libraries have on communities; we found major disparities in education spending and public safety spending.

Appendix 1

1. Elementary and secondary education
All activities associated with the operation of public elementary and secondary schools and locally operated vocational-technical schools. Special education programs operated by elementary and secondary school systems are also included as are all ancillary services associated with the operation of schools, such as pupil transportation and food service.
2. Financial administration
Activities concerned with tax assessment and collection, custody and disbursement of funds, debt management, administration of trust funds, budgeting, and other government-wide financial management activities. This function is not applied to school districts or special districts.
3. Fire protection
Applies to local government fire protection and prevention activities plus any ambulance, rescue, or other auxiliary services provided by a fire protection agency. Volunteer firefighters, if remunerated for their services on a "per fire" or some other basis, are included as part-time employees.
4. Higher education
Includes local government degree-granting institutions that provide academic training above grade 12.
5. Health
Includes administration of public health programs, community and visiting nurse services, immunization programs, drug abuse rehabilitation programs, health and food inspection activities, operation of outpatient clinics, and environmental pollution control activities.
6. Hospitals
Facilities providing in-patient medical care and institutions primarily for care and treatment (rather than education) of disabled people that are directly administered by a government, including those operated by public universities. Note that this definition does not include private hospitals, because the Annual Survey of State and Local Government Finances classifies public spending in this area separately (i.e., Health).
7. Housing and community development
Construction, operation, and support of housing and redevelopment projects and other activities to promote or aid public and private housing and community development.
8. Libraries
Establishment and provision of libraries for use by the general public and the technical support of privately operated libraries.

9. Other government administration
Applies to the legislative and government-wide administrative agencies of governments. Included here are overall planning and zoning activities and central personnel and administrative activities. This function is not applied to school district or special district governments.
10. Other and unallocable
Activities that are not applicable to other functions of government or are multi-functional.
11. Other education
Support of special programs and institutions primarily for: training and education (rather than care) of people who are blind, deaf, or have other disabilities; programs for adult, vocational, or special education that operate outside school systems; and educational activities not assignable to other education functions.
12. Policing
All activities concerned with the enforcement of law and order, including coroner's offices, police training academies, investigation bureaus, and local jails, "lockups," or other detention facilities not intended to serve as correctional facilities.
13. Public welfare
Includes the administration of various public assistance programs for the economically disadvantaged, veteran services, operation of nursing homes, indigent care institutions, and programs that provide payments for medical care, disability transportation, and other services for the economically disadvantaged.

Note: Definitions adapted from the 2006 *Government Finance and Employment Classification Manual* and the *Annual Survey of Public Employee and Payroll Glossary*.

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Authors

A.J. Million is the Director of the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (NACJD) at the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan. In 2017, he earned his Ph.D. in Information Science and Learning Technologies from the University of Missouri where his dissertation tested the relationship between forms of bureaucratic organization and innovation in U.S. state department of transportation websites. A.J.'s research examines topics such as public-sector information technology use, scholarly communication, knowledge infrastructures, research data management, and libraries. He has published in Cataloging and Classification Quarterly, College and Research Libraries, First Monday, JASIST, the Journal of Library Administration, Political Librarian, and OCLC Systems and Services. Before joining ICPSR, A.J. was a Postdoctoral Fellow in the School of Information at the University of Michigan and a Research Librarian for the Missouri Department of Transportation.

Jenny Bossaller is an Associate Professor at the iSchool at the University of Missouri. Her teaching and research focus on history of libraries and information, public libraries, information policy, and related social and technological phenomena. She has developed programs in the iSchool's LIS program focusing on public library leadership, health and wellness, and community engagement. She is co-author of Introduction to Public Librarianship, 3rd. ed., and 4th ed. (upcoming) and is recipient of the 2022 ALISE/Connie Van Fleet Award for Research Excellence in Public Library Services to Adults.

School Library Staffing Ratios and Student Outcomes: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom

EVERYLIBRARY INSTITUTE STAFF

ABSTRACT

This report is an analysis of the current data available on the impact of school libraries and librarians and media specialists within their school communities. It includes a broad diagnosis and establishes general goals for all advocates to be effective.

Across the US, access to school librarians is uneven and varies greatly. In states with staffing requirements for school librarians, access is better. Yet, it is clear that most school districts cannot meet the national standard of a full-time librarian in every school, regardless of enrollment size.

This report is an analysis of the current data available on the impact of school libraries and librarians and media specialists within their school communities. We use a broad diagnosis and establish general goals to be effective for all advocates, as every state has varying differences in socioeconomic, racial, environmental, and generational inequities. Additionally, every state has different laws on school librarian staffing, their responsibilities, and any certification requirements..

Determining the measurable impact and potential of school libraries and librarians requires a bottom-up approach to cut through the statistical noise created by the increasingly granular data factors used to assess the effects of micro- and macro-sociological institutions. Therefore, the first dataset that will serve as the statistical foundation of this report is an assessment of how many school librarians and media specialists currently are employed across our states and school districts.

Does Your State Have Enough School Librarians?

Data on school librarian staffing levels district-by-district nationwide come from the Common Core of Data (CCD) of the National Center for Education Statistics.[1] The latest data are for the 2021–22 school year. To anybody who has been monitoring the status of the profession over the past two decades, it will be no surprise to learn that no state has enough school librarians to meet the needs of all K–12 students and teachers. This limits the effectiveness of the data available as there is no current "role model" state with fully staffed school districts and corresponding data to exemplify.

[1]https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/files.asp

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But what constitutes "enough"? First promulgated in 2016 and revised in 2019, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) has an official position statement on "Appropriate Staffing for School Libraries." That statement specifies that an effective school library structured to transform teaching and learning throughout the school community requires "one or more certified school librarians working full-time in the school library to ensure access to resources and teaching and learning opportunities that engage all learners." Further, it is stated that "Every learner, classroom educator, and administrator in every school building at every grade level should have access to a fully staffed school library throughout the school day."[2]

Access to librarians significantly varies from state to state, but staffing shortages remain consistent. In 2021–22, only one state, Arkansas, had a majority (58.3%) of local districts with enough school librarians to have one in every school. Between one-quarter and one-half of districts were comparably staffed in each of nine states: South Carolina (47.5%), New Hampshire (42.6%), Connecticut (40.9%), Georgia (38.9%), Alabama (36.1%), Vermont (30.2%), Virginia (29.0%), Tennessee (28.6%), and New Jersey (28.2%). Those districts served between 20% and 60% of students in each of those states. On the opposite side of the staffing spectrum, in the District of Columbia and ten states, no districts met this staffing standard, leaving all students in those states without adequate access to school librarians based on this standard. Those ten states were Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, and West Virginia.

What Do These Data Tell Us?

While these data reveal the inequities of students' access to school librarians by state, what may be more revealing is access at the district level. Which students are most impacted by the lack of school librarians and adequately supported school library resources? An examination of CCD data from 2020–21 found that access to school librarians is strongly related to race and ethnicity.[3] This is further exacerbated for students living in extreme poverty, in more isolated locales, and in the smallest districts, where students are less likely to have access to the educational resources available in large urban areas. That school year, three million students in majority non-White districts were without any librarians, constituting 54% of the 5.6 million students in all districts without any librarians. Unfortunately, this gap between students in districts with a "library privilege" and those without librarians continues to widen.

Although inequitable access to libraries and librarians exists within states and school districts, standardized test scores from understaffed districts do not show a consistent and considerable correlation between librarian staffing and literacy scores. This finding conflicts with other research that posits that well-stocked, well-funded, and well-used school libraries managed by certified school librarians correlate consistently and positively with students' academic achievement.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) recently released the Nation's Report Card, a snapshot of state standardized test scores. When comparing the NAEP's available data on student literacy rates to library staffing rates, using the singular viewpoint that librarians consistently and positively correlate with higher academic achievement

[2]https://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/advocacy/statements/docs/AASL_Appropriate_Staffing.pdf
[3]https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/data_tables.asp

becomes problematic. The assumption would be that the states with the highest librarian staffing rates (Arkansas, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Georgia, Alabama, Vermont, Virginia, Tennessee, and New Jersey) would have higher literacy test scores than the states that have the least number of school districts meeting librarian staffing requirements (Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, and West Virginia). However, this assumption would be wrong, as there is no correlation between state-level standardized literacy scores and librarian staffing averages.[4]

Arkansas, the only state with a majority of its school districts meeting school librarian staffing requirements, was below average for student literacy.[5] Average student scores were even lower if the students were Black or Hispanic (with average scores 20 to 33 points lower than White students) and particularly worse for students of lower socioeconomic status. Students eligible for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in 2022 had an average score of 34 points lower than those who were not eligible. This performance gap was wider than in 1998 when average scores differed by 25 points between these same groups of students.

Given these facts, a new assumption must be made when comparing the available NAEP data to the CCD data. If librarians are as effective as some studies claim, other factors are lessening their statistical impact. One reason for this discrepancy may be that those studies that asserted the positive correlation between librarians and test scores considered what librarians do that can make a difference under "ideal circumstances." These best practices, each of which may only exist under ideal conditions not typically present in school districts, include:

- Instructing students, both with classroom teachers and independently;
- Planning collaboratively with classroom teachers;
- Providing professional development to teachers;
- Meeting regularly with the principal;
- Serving on key school leadership committees;
- Facilitating the use of technology by students and teachers;
- Providing technology support to teachers; and
- Providing reading incentive programs.

As this report highlights, fully staffed libraries are a rare ideal that few school districts achieve. Even when librarian staffing requirements are met, school districts seldom implement best practices, which limits the potential benefits a librarian can provide their school. Additionally, when compounding environmental, socioeconomic, racial, and generational inequities build, the daily impact of a school librarian is further mitigated.

When analyzing data from a broader societal level, determining how to improve scores in districts where disparities exist becomes paramount when acknowledging the lack of a consistent correlation between librarian staffing and literacy scores.

[4]https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile?chort=1&sub=RED&sj=AL&sfj=NP&st=MN&year=2022R3

[5]https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile/overview/AR?cti=PgTab_OT&chort=1&sub=RED&sj=AR&fs=Grade&st=MN&year=2022R3&sg=Gender%3A%20Male%20vs.%20Female&sgv=Difference&ts=Single%20Year&tss=2022R3&sfj=NPhttps://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile/overview/AR?cti=PgTab_OT&chort=1&sub=RED&sj=AR&fs=Grade&st=MN&year=2022R3&sg=Gender%3A%20Male%20vs.%20Female&sgv=Difference&ts=Single%20Year&tss=2022R3&sfj=NP

Overcoming the Barrier of Poverty on Literacy

Based on the findings of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), which measured children's reading ability in numerous countries over several decades, poverty is the most consistent and leading factor that impacts reading ability in children.[6] Using a multiple regression data analysis of measured factors, the positive effect of having access to a library on a child's reading ability is nearly as large as the negative effect of poverty. This finding can provide insight into why some states and school districts with comparatively high rates of poverty and adequately staffed school librarians (like Arkansas) report below-average literacy test scores.

Supporting other factors that boost reading comprehension alongside the adequate staffing of libraries and librarians is required to compensate for the negative effect of poverty on reading ability. The PIRLS revealed that simply having access to books (in the home or the community through a library) creates "pleasure reading" habits. The PIRLS also found that a healthy reading habit is the most positively impactful factor in developing a child's reading comprehension. Related to developing reading habits, a parent's reading in the home directly improves children's reading ability. However, parent reading rates directly correlate with socioeconomic status.

Consequently, improving access to books and inspiring a love for reading remain the most effective methods of developing reading comprehension for parents, children, and future generations.

School district staffing rates, standardized test scores, and poverty rates are not the only metrics to determine the long-term educational outcomes of students. An immediate area for advocacy and improvement is summer reading programs hosted by local libraries in conjunction with schools.

The Importance of Summer Reading

Numerous childhood development studies have measured differences between test scores from the beginning of the summer to the end and have unsurprisingly discovered that students did not retain information during the summer, specifically in reading ability and reading comprehension. A Rhode Island study and meta-analysis of summer learning studies found that, on average, students lose up to two months of grade-level equivalency in math during the summer when not engaged in learning.[7] For low-income students, that two-month loss also occurs in reading. A longitudinal study of a Baltimore, Maryland, summer program found that up to two-thirds of the achievement gap between low-income students and their more affluent peers could be attributed to unequal access to quality summer programming.

Increasing equitable access to literacy resources requires promoting and expanding the availability of after-school and summer literacy programs run by libraries. Poverty remains the largest barrier to literacy as it reduces access to reading materials, and libraries should continue to be championed as one of the most effective vectors of disseminating free resources to communities.

[6]https://blogs.ifla.org/literacy-reading/files/2021/05/Krashenpredictors-of-PIRLS.pdf
[7]https://nasbe.nyc3.digitaloceanspaces.com/2018/11/Standard_Jan2015_FINAL.pdf

Why Librarians Matter: What State Test Results Don't Tell Us

This macro view of data can be seen as minimizing the impact a librarian has within their school, but even in the most dire school districts, today's school librarians provide students with innumerable skills, including information literacy and how to interpret and analyze media. Each state has its regulations regarding school libraries, with many states not requiring a librarian. Numerous studies have shown that having a librarian in schools improves students' performance, but many states and communities are quick to cut funding for these programs. This section lists reasons why school librarians are necessary, the current status of school libraries throughout the country, and recommendations on school library policies.

Professional or certified school librarians are specifically trained to work with students and have extensive librarian-related experience like research, information literacy, book recommendations, and technology on top of their teaching experience. They work with students and other teachers to ensure everyone can access information in various formats and that reading is integrated across the curriculum. School librarians are leaders within their schools and help develop important skills in students from a young age because they focus on learning outcomes and individual discovery. Each state has different requirements to become a certified school librarian, with most requiring a teaching license and many requiring a master's degree. Many states prefer that those who obtain a master's attend an American Library Association (ALA) accredited school. This shows that the librarian has met certain standards in their education to receive the degree.

The School Library Investigation – Decline or Evolution? (SLIDE) found that "in 2018–19, there were more than 42,000 school librarians in the U.S. – almost 20% fewer than in 2009–10. Over the same interval, Instructional Coordinators increased by almost 34%, District Administrators by more than 16%, and School Administrators by more than 15%." There was a slight reduction in teachers of over 1%. Librarians have suffered more cuts than other teachers and education professionals.

More than 60 state-level library impact studies have been conducted in 26 states over the past two decades. In "Why school librarians matter: What years of research tell us," authors Keith Curry Lance and Debra E. Kachel synthesize the studies and conclude that quality school library programs result in higher student achievement, graduation rates, and mastery of academic standards. These benefits are more pronounced for at-risk students, including students of color, students from low-income households, and students with disabilities. In a Pennsylvania study, nearly 8% more students scored at the advanced level in reading on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) in schools with a full-time, certified librarian than in schools without.

The effect of library staffing on writing scores was even greater: Students with full-time librarians were almost three times more likely than those without librarians to have advanced writing scores. On average, Black and Latino students whose schools had larger library collections (versus those who did not) more than doubled their percentages of advanced writing scores and cut their risk of below-basic writing scores in half. In a 2015 Washington State study, the presence of a certified school librarian was also a predictor of higher

[8]"Requirements to become a school librarian by state," EveryLibrary Institute. https://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/requirements_to_become_a_school_librarian_by_state?gclid=CjwKCAiA2fmdBhBpEiwA4CcHzbvrWzt-rm6_DVhXB3J7AybF8yKor2CuHNw0G7xwQFm_JihFkafYwRoCspwQAvD_BwE

[9] "Perspectives on School Librarian Employment in the United States, 2009-10 to 2018-19," SLIDE https://libslide.org/pubs/Perspectives.pdf

elementary and middle school math scores. While these studies emphasize the need for certified school librarians, staffing is only part of the solution. To ensure an effective school library program, budgeting and resources, scheduling, and support personnel must also be considered.

Media literacy is not a new subject, but now it is more important than ever. Media literacy skills are critical for higher education and many professions. Libraries are helpful places to learn about the many different types of media (i.e., articles, social media posts, infographics, and reports), and librarians can help answer questions about unfamiliar media and become better media consumers. Being a savvy consumer and producer of media is increasingly vital and challenging in the ever-evolving media and technology ecosystems of the twenty-first century. School librarians help students know what to ask and what to look for when encountering different types of media and information, particularly online. Librarians have a formal background in digital literacy and are therefore qualified to teach students how to find and interpret media.

Librarians do more than increase test scores, and increasing staffing ratios is not the only answer to improving the impact of the profession and the literacy of our future generations.

Advocacy Goals

Although it remains a relatively easy and understandable goal to meet, simply increasing librarian staffing rates is not the catch-all solution for improving the impact and success of library programs. As highlighted in the report, the professional and community circumstances librarians find themselves in and the barriers to providing services to children are the most mitigating factors of the profession.

A librarian cannot singlehandedly change a community's socioeconomic and generational inequities. Still, they can help mitigate key problems affecting their locale by expanding school library services and implementing best practices. To reiterate those best practices, librarians must have the means to:

- Instruct students, both with classroom teachers and independently;
- Plan collaboratively with classroom teachers;
- Provide professional development to teachers;
- Meet regularly with the principal;
- Serve on key school leadership committees;
- Facilitate the use of technology by students and teachers;
- Provide technology support to teachers; and
- Provide reading incentive programs.

The role of school librarians extends beyond books, focusing on student well-being, whole-child policy, and school climate. School library leaders should actively define and communicate the librarian's role to nonlibrarians within the educational community, highlighting their contributions to addressing learning loss, social-emotional learning, and school climate. Collaboration with other stakeholders, such as school counselors, art educators, and special education professionals, can strengthen support systems for students and promote a holistic educational environment.

Therefore, the most achievable advocacy goals that would significantly improve the positive effect of having a librarian are:

- Encouraging academic libraries to have school library professional development collections within their School of Education collections and programs.
- Encouraging the creation of a new AASL/ALISE task force focused on integrating school librarianship into preservice teacher practicums and conducting outreach to schools of education to promote adoption.

As previously stated, data-based solutions are the most effective tool for creating meaningful and compelling advocacy. The most pertinent advocacy goal then would be pushing for the commission of new studies, surveys, and reports to inform administrators, education policy stakeholders, educator preparedness programs, and school boards about the role and impact of school librarians.

School library leaders should embrace data-driven advocacy, collecting and utilizing data to demonstrate the impact of school libraries and librarians on student success. Engaging in collaborative efforts and aligning their work with existing frameworks and initiatives, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Whole Child legislation, can enhance support for specific student populations and foster inclusive educational environments.

Librarians, like teachers, cannot change the circumstances of the lives of their students outside of school, but they can be more effective within their roles. As administrators relay information, training, and priorities to school staff, the most important advocacy goal should be the development of a model curriculum for programs that certify school administrators to educate and inform emerging administrators about school librarians and the design and use of library spaces.

School library leaders should leverage these to plan and advocate for school libraries' continued relevance and value. By addressing students as individuals, promoting student agency, and actively engaging with stakeholders, they can ensure that school library programs and spaces effectively meet the needs of students and contribute to their long-term success.

Although staffing ratios remain important factors in long-term literacy outcomes, particularly for schools in low-income areas, advocates must highlight the necessity of expanding and restoring effective school librarianship in districts that lack proficient school library programs. Ratios are not a panacea. The number of school librarians is material, but so is the quality of the collection and the ways school librarians are embedded in the school ecosystem.

Sustaining Local Library Advocacy in Today's Political Environment

PETER D. PEARSON

ABSTRACT

This brief white paper offers practical, suscinct advice for navigating local library advocacy efforts through two straits: sustainable operational funding and the library's commitment to intellectual freedom, which is chiefly embodied in its unimpeded ability to develop an integral collection that serves the entire community.

Is there ever a time when library funding seems plentiful, stable and secure? This certainly has not been the case in the 32 years that I have worked in and consulted with libraries and Library Friends and Foundations. And yet there seems to be a reluctance by many library directors and library support organizations to engage in political advocacy activities in support of their library's operational funding.

The American Library Association began to recognize the need for sustained political advocacy back in the mid 1990's. ALA Presidents began to embrace advocacy as a key part of their presidential platforms. Eventually this prompted the creation of ALA's Washington D.C. office. However, the focus of ALA's advocacy has always been directed to the federal level hoping to impact funding of IMLS and LSTA funds allocated to state library offices.

While this national advocacy is important to keep the eyes of Congress on library needs, it doesn't address the source of funding that is the mainstay for most public, school and academic libraries: local municipal funding. For most of these libraries, this local funding represents 90% or more of its total operational funding. Why shouldn't this local funding be the focus of advocacy efforts for all types of libraries?

The reasons are many and varied. Probably the most frequent objection that is used has to do with the legality of lobbying by 501(c)(3) organizations. There is a misperception that it is illegal for nonprofit organizations to lobby. This is not the case. Indeed, the IRS has set up guidelines for nonprofits about how to lobby legally without jeopardizing their nonprofit status. The most important guidance is that nonprofits cannot lobby for the election of a specific individual and cannot expend more than 20% of their budget annually on lobbying activities. Since most library lobbying at the local level is done by volunteers, it's not difficult to stay withing the 20% spending limit. And a legal alternative to endorsing a single candidate is to host candidate forums at the library in which questions about support of

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library funding can be asked of all candidates running for elected office.

Another reason that lobbying for local funding is not readily encouraged is the issue of trust. The most effective local lobbying will not be done by the library director or its key staff. In most places, the library director is prohibited from lobbying the local elected officials. However, even if that prohibition did not exist, the library director would not make the most effective lobbyist. Simply put, the elected officials expect the head of a department in the city or county to want extra funding. It would be viewed as building their empire rather than a statement about community need. This necessitates using volunteers from the community to serve as lobbyists. The better known and more influential the volunteers are, the more effective they will be carrying the message of needed library funding to the local elected officials. A bank president, a corporate officer or a civic philanthropist will have a huge impact on the elected officials. The elected officials know there is nothing self-serving about their request for added library funding. However, these citizen lobbyists need to be educated about the cycle of library funding, the underfunded parts of the library's budget and the needed services that library funding supports. All of this takes a great deal of trust on the part of the library director that these citizens will accurately represent the library's funding needs. Without the library director's complete support of a citizen advocacy effort, it will fail.

What might a citizen-based library local advocacy effort look like? It starts with the creation of a standing committee for advocacy within the Friends or Foundation. In addition to Board members of those organizations, the committee should include politically active individuals that represent every geographic area of the library's service area. The first meetings should happen well in advance of a new budget being adopted. Initial meetings are when the library director educates the volunteers about the library's budget and programs. In future meetings the committee learns where the biggest gaps exist in library funding. The committee typically zeros in on one or two funding areas for which they will advocate. The platform is put into the format of a position paper which describes the funding request with rationale. This is then presented individually by committee members to every member of the elected official Board. Committee volunteers also attend budget sessions and provide public testimony as needed. The keys to success with this type of citizen lobbying are:

- Creating a standing advocacy committee
- Working under the guidance of the library director
- Starting the process early in the budget year and not an 11th hour lobbying effort
- Meeting with each elected official and carrying the identical message
- Creating a position paper requesting specific funding initiatives
- Continuing the effort every year so that elected officials begin to recognize the advocates and develop trusting relationships with them

In this piece, the focus has been on advocacy for operational funding. Obviously, libraries are facing an even greater challenge with book banning. There is a danger in having the advocacy committee including this issue in their advocacy efforts. A number of elected officials are rallying around the book banning issue. Tying the library's operational funding to a stance on this controversial issue could create a strong backlash resulting in funding cuts. Instead, there should be an intellectual freedom committee that works in concert with the

advocacy committee to provide them with talking points in case the issue should surface at a budget hearing. But tying funding to the issue of book bans is a losing proposition.

The need for library local advocacy has never been greater. Volunteers from Library Friends and Foundations make the best local advocates. The library director can empower and educate them and then stay behind the scenes while the volunteer advocates carry the library's message for needed funding to the elected officials. The best time to have created an advocacy committee was ten years ago. The second-best time is right now. Don't let your budget languish for another year. Make this a priority for the benefit of everyone who accesses library services in your community.

Author

Peter D. Pearson
Pearson, Dewane & Hall Consultants
Member of the Community Advocacy Team of
The Library Foundation for Sarasota (FL) County

Less Whining, More Dining: The Importance of Relationship Building in Library Advocacy

MICHAEL CARLOZZI

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the author's application of Cheryl Stenström and Ken Haycock's research on library funding advocacy to two public libraries which he had directed. Their research had suggested the importance of relationship building. Based on this research, the author built relationships with funding authorities and found success; in one of his libraries, funding had increased by around 40% in two years, and proposed budget cuts at his other library were reversed.

Introduction

In 2016, I became director of the Wareham Free Library in Wareham, Massachusetts, a library with the dubious distinction of being "decertified." This title meant that Wareham had failed to meet state-level library standards, such as operating a minimum number of hours, a direct result of having suffered severe funding cuts. The library had become a shell of itself; about a decade earlier, when I had worked there as a page, it had been ranked 11th in the state in terms of programming, a notable accomplishment for a community of just around 20,000 persons. Now, it barely offered monthly programs. I had come aboard to try and turn things around, ultimately regaining certification.

The task seemed daunting. Trust between library supporters and town officials was very low; a few years earlier, the Board of Library Trustees and the town's governing body, the Board of Selectmen, had been involved in contentious litigation around ownership of the library's donation accounts. Town officials claimed that budget cuts were necessary given the town's woeful finances, and library supporters countered that the library had been unfairly targeted to "punish" residents for having failed to, in 2014, vote to "override" the town's property tax levy limit. After the tax measure's failure, the library's budget was swiftly halved.

To say the least, Wareham harbored a politically-charged atmosphere.

In preparing for this position, I had been researching evidence-based recommendations on reversing budget cuts. Many of the recommendations struck me as too hackneyed (e.g., sharing statistics about the library's value or initiating a letter writing campaign) or too aggressive (e.g., recruiting an outside firm to back a library-based ballot referendum). Besides, many of these recommendations had already been tried. It seemed unrealistic, for example, to muster adequate support behind a library referendum when the override vote

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had failed. And, after starting the job, I quickly learned that library supporters had already tried aggressive tactics, threatening to "vote out" town officials who had consented to library cuts. In the end, the officials consented to the cuts and no one had been voted out of office; in fact, incumbents had easily won their next elections.

It all seemed quite hopeless until I discovered Cheryl Stenström and Ken Haycock's (2015) research on evidence-based library advocacy. Their opening in *Public Libraries Online* might as well have been about Wareham: " . . . large-scale efforts in mobilizing angry patrons rarely result in a full reversal of the [funding cut], and likely make any future negotiations even more tense."

Their work centers on Robert Cialdini's framework of interpersonal influence, which posited six "tactics" for influencing decision makers. Stenström's dissertation had analyzed a sample of Canadian funding authorities to find that Cialdini's concept of "liking" was the most important tactic among the six. In this framework, "liking" means exactly what it says: the extent to which a funding authority likes the person requesting funding. Stenström posited that one way to improve "liking" might be through repeated exposure, that is, returning to the same funder not to pester them about the library's budget, but to build a meaningful relationship in which both parties regard each other as valued colleagues. As Stenström writes (2012), "When decision makers considered funding for public libraries, this study showed they most often used three distinct lenses: the consistency lens (what are my values? what would my party do?), the authority lens (is someone with hierarchical power telling me to do this?) and most importantly, the liking lens (how much do I like and know about libraries and the requester?)" (p. 149).

Interesting research, I thought. Stenström studied this subject in her 2012 dissertation, and Haycock had enjoyed a long and storied career involving library advocacy. Surely these were people I should trust, at least over my own (likely to be wrong) instincts.

I have come to learn that municipal library directors must straddle two worlds: the library, with its concerns of patron privacy, service delivery, equitable access, and internal policies, and the municipality, with its almost rabid insistence on suppressing taxes. Municipal leaders may often sympathize with library concerns, but they must balance a budget in accordance with numerous departmental needs and voter preferences. Many American municipalities unwittingly cultivate an atmosphere of departmental competition; Sam Amdursky (2019) argued that all public libraries need to declare funding independence because "[w]hen public libraries compete for funds with police, fire, sewers, schools, planning, and assessor's offices, they lose." Municipal budgeting is a zero-sum game, since more money for the library means less money for the police department, and elected officials, as well as municipal administrators, keenly feel this "give and take."

New library directors can underestimate this delicate tension. Many library directors often answer to a Board of Trustees, yet their department's success ultimately relies on funding authorities. Directors can dream up as many suites of robust services as they wish, but if those services are not funded, then they are worth even less than the paper on which they had been printed. Although some public libraries' funding is indeed independent, through some manner of dedicated levy/millage or large endowment, in many libraries, especially in New England, funding is controlled by a government body, be it a city council or finance committee.

So, having digested all of Stenström and Haycock's published work, I decided to try and apply their findings. While all of Cialdini's persuasive tactics seemed important (for example, I wanted to cultivate "authority" by appearing competent), "liking" appeared most within my control and had the largest empirical support in Stenström's dissertation. I first had to identify who really controlled the town's funding. I do not mean "controlled" by statute or charter; technically, the voters controlled the funding because they appropriated funds at the annual Town Meeting (in Wareham, as in many New England towns, budgets are passed at

Town Meetings by a majority of attending registered voters). One could say that the Finance Committee controlled the funding, because it was their budget which was sent to the Town Meeting, and voters rarely contested what they presented; one could also argue it was the Board of Selectmen, because they were the ones who appointed the Finance Committee members.

Yet after some months on the job, my observations coalesced on one figure so dominating and charismatic that I had yet to see anyone seriously disagree with his financial advice: the town administrator. Given his financial background and political skill, he was so well-respected that everyone more or less went along with him. The scant number of voters who attended Town Meeting were quite compliant, certainly on budgeting issues, and the elected officials almost always deferred to the town administrator's judgment. Yes, they disagreed with him on matters of governance, but when it came to the town's finances, they trusted – if not revered – his judgment.

I figured that the path to success lay through him. In Stenström and Haycock's language, I needed exposure, that is, I needed to be respected and liked by the town administrator, something which could happen after repeated meetings. I stopped spending so much time in the library working on routine administrative matters and instead visited town hall. The town administrator and I initially discussed library-related matters but eventually covered other subjects of mutual interest such as the school department and bond issuances. After several months, I no longer viewed these meetings as part of my job, or as an attempt to apply Stenström and Haycock's research; they felt more like spending time with a colleague and friend.

I stayed in Wareham for only two years, but in that time our budget increased by over 40%, which was notable given that I had begun the position with a warning that the library might permanently close due to budgetary constraints. Our success resulted from an unexpected windfall. Massachusetts had recently legalized the recreational purchase of marijuana, and the town administrator saw potential revenue. While surrounding municipalities decried the moral rot which had inspired such legislation, Wareham understood that opportunistic towns would profit off the change – and one of those towns might as well be Wareham. The town administrator negotiated a payment plan with a prospective vendor so that Wareham received, in addition to state-mandated sales tax proceeds, at least $100,000 per year.

The question became where to allocate that money. Like many municipalities, Wareham has many underfunded departments: the police had not been fully staffed, or close to it, since the Great Recession; public works had only around a dozen workers to manage all of the town's roads, trees, and buildings, a drop of around 50% from a decade prior; and the town's funds employed only a part-time director at the senior center. The town administrator recommended that half of the marijuana revenue be sent to the school department, which was always in need, and the other half to the library, giving us the final push needed to regain state-level certification. These funds could have gone anywhere, but they went to the library.

From the Bay to the Ocean

I then went to direct the East Providence Public Library in East Providence, Rhode Island. East Providence was transitioning from a council-manager form of government to that of a strong mayor. After the inauguration, I immediately contacted the mayor in a bid to repeat my relationship building in Wareham. Yet, for reasons unrelated to this narrative, our professional relationship never really developed. Fortunately, and contrary to popular opinion in the city, the mayor was not the city's funding authority; that honor belonged to the five-person City Council, a body very independent from not only the mayor's authority but also his priorities.

I thus pivoted from courting the mayor to the City Council. I invited all of the Councilpersons to the library, and three of the five took me up on the offer. At these

meetings, we discussed their vision of the library and how we could serve their constituents better. I was pleased to find that my invitations had yielded more than political goodwill; we had brainstormed some promising ideas, such as having one Councilperson assist with a wellness clinic for our adult language learners. Afterward, I stayed in fairly regular contact with these Councilpersons, making it a point to attend non-political events they hosted, sponsored, or even just participated in (e.g., one might be a speaker at a flag raising event).

In August of 2020, I resigned from my position for family reasons. However, prior to my resignation, the mayor had submitted to the City Council a budget which had cut almost $150,000 from the library, wiping out most of its materials and programming line items (East Providence's fiscal year begins in November, so budget negotiations begin in July). I had initially consented to some cuts, given the COVID-19 pandemic's colossal disruption. Shortly thereafter, however, I learned that other departments had not been cut at all, and, in fact, some had even received sizable increases.

After learning of this, I contacted the Councilpersons with whom I had established relationships. I argued that cutting the library made little sense when other departments, some of which were currently providing hardly any public service, went untouched. The Councilpersons agreed and pledged to restore the funding. And on the night they received the library's budget from the mayor, they did just that.

But Did This Really Matter?

Did my application of Stenström and Haycock's research engineer financial success? It sure sounds nice. In Wareham, more aggressive and bellicose tactics had failed to make headway. The relationship between the town and library had degenerated to a point where the town was considering, perhaps only half-seriously but dangerous even to consider, defunding the library altogether. With relationship building between me and the town's primary financial authority, we saw a dramatic turnaround. And in East Providence, proposed cuts were swiftly reversed after I had contacted my Councilpersons; from them, I had received vigorous support and decisive action.

But, in all honesty, who can really say? It's very possible that, regardless of who was director and how that person approached budgeting, Wareham's town administrator would have funded the library in order to regain certification. Even though the public had stopped agitating for it, certification was still an important end goal, and it only took $100,000 or so to guarantee it. And perhaps the East Providence City Council would have still restored the library's budget; after all, the Councilpersons I worked with did not comprise some random sample of Councilpersons. They worked with me, in part, because they already supported library services.

So, with this type of N=1 example, it's hard to know whether my research-based approach helped. With that said, since Stenstrom and Haycock's publications, more research has come out supporting the value of relationship building. For example, Million and Bossaller (2020) surveyed state library associations, finding that respondents valued relationship building with legislators and policy-makers. Also published in this journal's pages, Michelle Boisvenue-Fox (2018) argued that "relationships matter in politics," relaying the story of Lance Werner, Library Journal's 2018 Librarian of the Year, whose consensus building led to much success for his library's millage. It is certainly an approach that makes good theoretical sense, i.e., we should expect it to work based on the importance of human relationships in every other domain, and it is also one which has at least some empirical support.

Concluding Thoughts

I applied Stenström and Haycock's research to two library systems in an attempt to increase funding and stave off cuts, namely by building relationships with local authorities. My takeaway advice for library directors would be to build relationships with funding

authorities in good or neutral times. You do not want to be in a position where you are unsure of how to approach proposed cuts to your library. You do not want to be reactive because by then it may be too late. You want to be in a position where the funding authority, whoever or whatever they are, likes you – yes, you, personally you – to such an extent that if the library does get cut then you can feel confident that it was unavoidable. Local funding authorities ultimately are people, not abstract bureaucracies which dispassionately manipulate spreadsheets. Their decisions affect themselves, their neighbors, their friends, and their voters. They are very real people, and you should approach them as such.

Or, to paraphrase Haycock in this YouTube video (2015): you need to do more wining and dining, and less whining.

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Author

Michael Carlozzi is a recovering Joycean and a dad. He was a library director at the Wareham Free Library (Massachusetts) and the East Providence Public Library (Rhode Island).

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