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American Library Association

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# ALA President Issues Statement Concerning the Library Controversy in West Bend, WI

The following is a statement issued by American Library Association President Jim Rettig regarding efforts to remove Library Board members and to restrict materials in the West Bend (Wisconsin) Community Memorial Library:

“Last week, the West Bend, Wisconsin Common Council voted to deny reappointment to four Library Board members, based on objections to these members’ ‘ideology’ and their adherence to library policy concerning challenges to materials in the library collection. This move appears to be motivated largely in response to an ongoing campaign that seeks to restrict access to books in the West Bend Community Memorial Library’s young adult collection of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender fiction and nonfiction.

“We are dismayed by and deeply concerned about these developments. Libraries connect people and ideas, by providing access to a diverse array of information to meet the needs of everyone in the community. Whatever their personal beliefs, library board members have an obligation to support this unique role of the public library. When individuals or groups attempt to block access to library materials in the name of their own particular beliefs, we must all oppose such efforts and we must preserve the intellectual freedom rights of the entire community.

“Fanning the flames of this controversy, opponents of open access in libraries have launched a campaign spreading fear and misinformation. Newspaper and radio ads call on the community to ‘protect our children,’ and have compared the removal of books from the library to buckling a child’s seat belt. A city Alderman has even gone so far as to compare the West Bend Community Memorial Library to a porn shop.

“The materials in question are not pornography. They include award-winning novels and acclaimed works of nonfiction. To advocate for the removal or restriction of these materials on the basis of partisan or doctrinal disapproval is censorship, pure and simple. Parents who believe a book is not appropriate for their own children are free to make that decision—for their children; they do not have the right nor the authority to make it for anyone else’s children.

“Because it supports intellectual freedom, the American Library Association (ALA) opposes book banning and censorship in any form, and supports librarians and library board members whenever they resist censorship in their libraries. Since our society is very diverse, libraries have a responsibility to provide materials that reflect the interests of all of their patrons.

“We stand in support of the librarians and Library Board members of the West Bend Community Memorial Library and the community members who defend intellectual freedom and open access to ideas. By resisting calls to censor potentially controversial materials, they promote and protect true education and learning, and uphold the cherished freedoms that we, as Americans, hold most dear.”