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Letter from the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom

Angela Maycock

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Office for Intellectual Freedom
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611-2795

ALA American Library Association

Kathryn Engelbrecht, President
West Bend Library Board
West Bend Community Memorial Library
630 Poplar Street
West Bend, WI 53095

February 27, 2009

Dear Ms. Engelbrecht,

I am writing to you and your fellow board members on behalf of the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom, to express concern regarding the recent challenges to numerous books in the West Bend Community Memorial Library's collection. We understand that a patron has expressed objections to a list of 60+ titles, and that the Library Board will consider the request for reconsideration at an open meeting. We urge the Library Board to uphold the freedom to read and the importance of intellectual freedom by supporting the inclusion of these books in the collection.

We understand that the titles in question are drawn largely from the library's collection of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender fiction and non-fiction for young adult readers. Like many books, those under consideration may not be right for every user of the West Bend Community Memorial Library. But the library has a responsibility to represent a broad range of views in its collection and to meet the needs of everyone in the community it serves – not just the most vocal, the most powerful, or even the majority. Library users may rightfully voice their concerns and select different materials for themselves and their children, but those objecting to the books should not be given the power to restrict other users' rights of access to the material.

We extend our full support to the librarians of the West Bend Community Memorial Library, who work to select a diverse range of materials for the collection without shying away from potentially controversial subjects. We encourage the Library Board to express respect and support for the judgment of librarians in their selection of material based on professional expertise and standards, as well as users' constitutional right to obtain access to a broad range of materials and ideas, including those that some may find controversial or objectionable.

We strongly urge the Library Board to reaffirm the importance and value of the freedom to read by retaining the books under consideration in the library collection. By doing so, the Board will send a message to its users, particularly young readers – that, in this country, they have the responsibility and the right to think critically about what they read, rather than allowing others to think for them.

Sincerely,

Angela Maycock
Assistant Director