



November 12, 2021

Dear Superintendent Baker and Spotsylvania County Public Schools' School Board Members,

The Virginia Library Association has been closely following the recent book challenges in your school libraries and curriculum. As supporters of the intellectual freedom of all people – including students – we are surprised at the vitriol pointed at these titles by some members of your board. We are particularly concerned by the declaration by two of your members that books they disapprove of should be burned, according to *The Free Lance-Star*, a statement more in keeping with the 1940s than the 2020s.

Spotsylvania County is not the first school system in Virginia or the country to experience a challenged book. However, removing books without proper consideration is a violation of student's First Amendment rights. We recommend you review the Supreme Court Case *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853, 868-69 (1982). This case found that "the First Amendment imposes limitations upon a local school board's exercise of its discretion to remove books from high school and junior high school libraries." The Court further found that while the school board has power over the local curriculum, this power does not extend to the "regime of voluntary inquiry" represented by the library (<https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/usrep/usrep457/usrep457853/usrep457853.pdf>).

As librarians who study and track intellectual freedom challenges around the nation, we often see a "bump" in challenges following the American Library Association's Annual Banned Books Week (September 26-October 2 of this year). Ironically, a week that is set aside to emphasize the dangers of banning books can be manipulated by some into showcasing the exact behaviors we are trying not to model for our students.

Developing a collection for a school library is a process, one that is worked on every day by your collection specialists. They evaluate thousands of titles each year, looking to ensure their accuracy, timeliness, value, and connection to the curriculum (including but not limited to the VA Standards of Learning). As an association of 4800+ librarians and library staff in the Commonwealth, we understand the education, training and competencies of

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your school librarians and staff and support them as educators and materials selectors.

We offer our assistance and expertise should you need any support while doing so.

Respectfully,

The Virginia Library Association Executive Committee

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