



Louisiana Library Association

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Setting the Record Straight: A Statement by the Louisiana Library Association in Response to the “Protecting Innocence Report” from Louisiana Attorney General Landry

The Protecting Innocence Report by the Office of the Attorney General alleges that librarians in Louisiana are not concerned about the families and children that they serve. On the contrary, librarians serve our Parishes with professional integrity and deep concern for children, families, and our communities. The report also alleges that public libraries provide minors with unrestricted access to sexually explicit materials. This is untrue. Louisiana public libraries have policies and protections in place that enable parents to make good choices for their children.

The Louisiana Library Association is the leading membership organization for librarians and library workers in our state. Our membership represents the interests of public libraries and the principles of library work. Our members have professional training in policy development, including material review and selection. It is important to note that the Louisiana Library Association was not contacted by the Attorney General’s office prior to the release of the Report. We would have welcomed the opportunity to share about library policy and practices and to dialogue with the Attorney General on this topic.

In our professional experience, the Protecting Innocence Report proposes a solution to a nonexistent problem. All public library policies in general - and collection development policies in particular - are created to be affirmative of human and civil rights. Our collection policies are designed to represent the views, needs, and interests of all of our stakeholders. Far from being antiquated, library policies are under constant review by librarians and Boards of Control to address issues presented by advances in technology and our changing communities. Any efforts by groups or individuals to manipulate library collections towards a particular viewpoint will always be resisted by libraries. This is our long-standing defense of the freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment. When it becomes clear that efforts are being made to dehumanize a particular portion of the population by stigmatizing their voices or restricting access to information or ideas, the library and its supporters will always protect the basic human and civil rights of the community it serves.

During the news conference announcing the release of the Report, one Louisiana state senator suggested that it is possible for a child to walk into a public library in Louisiana and take a copy of *Penthouse* magazine from the shelf. We need to be very clear here: public libraries in Louisiana do not subscribe to pornographic magazines either in print or digital format. This statement appeared to be designed to anger and frighten parents and others who are concerned about the innocence of children. False statements about library materials do nothing to contribute to the dialogue around this topic and, instead, call into question the intentions of people making these false accusations. Public libraries do not select or purchase pornography for their collections, nor do any of the materials listed in current challenges across the state meet the definition of pornography.

The Protecting Innocence Report contains a list of titles that are labeled as sexually explicit. These titles were written for adults and teens. Material that is written or created for adults is

shelved in the adult sections in Louisiana libraries. In the Sample Language for Collection Development Policy section of the Report, it is suggested that sexually explicit material in Young Adult collections be shelved separately from the rest of the Young Adult collection. In essence, this suggestion presents a scenario in which materials that are age-appropriate for teens are stigmatized along with the populations of people represented in those stories. Creating areas within libraries that house “objectionable” or “sexually explicit” material ignores the merit inherent in those titles as works of literature that should be judged in their entirety as required by the Miller Test. The 1973 U.S. Supreme Court case *Miller v. California* established the primary legal test for establishing if expression is obscene. A recent case against Barnes and Noble in Virginia found that the title *Gender Queer* did not meet the legal requirements for obscenity, allowing booksellers to continue making the title available to anyone without restriction.

It is the position of the Louisiana Library Association that all materials should be shelved in libraries according to their intended audience. As the Report notes, materials that are sexually explicit are not, by definition, pornographic nor are they harmful. The inclusion or exclusion of sexually explicit material should not be driven by special interest groups. The definition of the term “sexually explicit” detailed in the document is a broad one that encompasses all mention of sexual conduct. If Louisiana libraries were to follow the Report’s definition it would prompt the removal of all books from the teen sections of libraries that reference sex, sexuality, or gender in any way. Libraries already have in place systems of review and selection for children and teens and consider the age-appropriateness of material in deciding where those materials will be placed within the library. Passing laws mandating what is already a common practice is unnecessary and redundant.

The Report states that almost all libraries lack policies that preserve a parent or guardian’s right to control and limit their child’s exposure to sexually explicit materials. In fact, most Louisiana libraries do have policies in place which state that parents are responsible for guiding their children in selecting material appropriate for them. Libraries empower individual family values without infringing on other families’ rights to do the same based on differing family values. Libraries across the state approach this concern differently but take seriously the rights and responsibilities of parents to guide their children’s use of library materials. Some libraries have already put into place the options for library cards with different levels of access, while others are in the process of establishing those parameters for their patrons to choose age-level access to both print and digital collections. All libraries house age-appropriate material for children and teens in different sections so that children and teens may browse the collections under the guidance of their parents. Books and other materials intended for an adult audience are already shelved in the adult section of the library. Librarians have worked with and continue to work with vendors to ensure that parents have the option to limit access to digital titles and other content they determine are not appropriate for their children.

In the Sample Language for Collection Development Policy section of the Report, it is suggested that sexually explicit materials should not be included in the children’s collection. Libraries have the responsibility to include age-appropriate materials about puberty and sexual development as it relates to health and a child’s changing body. It is always the parent’s right to direct their children to the books and information that is suitable for their own family. Libraries carefully review and select materials to address a range of concerns that parents and guardians as well as children may have. It is the position of the Louisiana Library Association that libraries should provide materials to meet the needs of children and their parents as they navigate the difficult and sometimes confusing years during puberty. It is also necessary to represent the wide range of families in our communities which consist of immigrants, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+, black, white, young, old, single people, and families in their many forms.

The Louisiana Library Association supports the right of parents to make choices about their own family's reading while affirming the right of the entire community to access the reading of their own choosing as well. We invite interested stakeholders to consider the real scope and depth of policies and practices by Louisiana libraries which affirm these rights and safeguard children. Our hope is that through ongoing discussion and dialogue we can move past the allegations in the Report and work together for families in every Parish.

About the Louisiana Library Association

The Louisiana Library Association is the professional community for librarians and library workers in Louisiana. LLA is dedicated to providing an environment where networking, continuing education, peer support, advocacy, and professional development can thrive. Our work supports and extends the development of high-quality library services, collections, and facilities, which in turn support instruction, research, self-education, and pleasure reading in order that the citizens of Louisiana may be well-informed and able to achieve full self-development. <https://llaonline.org/>

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