

**Amy Olsen, Director
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In **2022**, the Trustees of the Lanpher Memorial Library updated the Collection Development policy. Among small edits, they removed the language: “Potential Problems or Challenges” and replaced it with a new policy: “Intellectual Freedom Policy and Request for Reconsideration of Materials”.

The process of reviewing, changing, and updating the policy, also served as a time for the Trustees to be made aware of the issues and trends regarding book challenges, and to be reacquainted with the Library Bill of Rights and Freedom to Read Statement.

It gave all of us an opportunity to imagine what it might be like if someone did come into the Library with an expression of concern and to have a plan in place if we needed it.

The Lanpher Library highlights Banned Books Week each year as a way to celebrate the freedom to read with displays throughout the building and on the Library lawn. This year, we included a “Banned Books Day” on the last Saturday of Banned Books Week. The local chapter of Amnesty International had a table, and we had games (“Match the title to the reason it’s challenged or banned”) and anyone who participated got a “Freedom to Read” pencil. We also gave away copies of “The Hate U Give” (leftover from when that title was the VHC Vermont Reads title), and had a StoryWalk® of *And Tango Makes Three*, a frequently challenged/banned title by Justin Richardson & Peter Parnell, Illus. by Henry Cole.

When I see any professional development opportunity, whether at a conference, or online workshop about book challenges, bans, and Intellectual Freedom, I try to attend. Each time, I learn something new: ways to improve our policy and procedures (Only allow a title to be challenged once in a certain amount of time) new ways to phrase things (“Expression of Concern” as a first step, rather than “Potential Challenge”), soft censorship fears, the idea that if our policy is in a really accessible place, and that if the public knows we have a policy in place for book challenges, it’s less likely that someone will take the step to formally challenge materials.

Vermont Libraries value Intellectual Freedom. When I was elected Vice President of the Vermont Library Association in 2018, the VLA board had been in the middle of working on an organizational chart. Among other reasons for having a formal organizational structure, there were so many voting members of the Board that it was difficult to achieve a quorum. In the draft chart that went before the VLA membership at the 2019 Annual Meeting for a vote of approval, the chair of the Intellectual Freedom Committee, while still a VLA Board member, would not be a voting member of the Board. Our membership spoke out against that. They (rightly), maintained that the chairperson of the committee that upholds the core value of librarianship should definitely be a voting member of the VLA Board. An amendment was made, and

ultimately, when the final organizational chart was approved by the VLA Membership in 2020, the Chair of Intellectual Freedom Committee was a voting member of the VLA Board.

In the months that followed that final vote, I think about how many times I reached out to the Intellectual Freedom Committee Chair for help in wording our new policy, or to pass along new information that I thought would be important for them to have, or attended the John Swan Intellectual Freedom lecture sponsored by the VLA Intellectual Freedom Committee. I think about the record numbers of books that are challenged and banned in the U.S. right now, and the legislation around the U.S., that if passed, will not only infringe on First Amendment Rights, but some will penalize Librarians and other Educators, and I am grateful to the Members of VLA for insisting that Intellectual Freedom Committee Chair have voting rights on the VLA Board.

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Tj5WQVBmB6SQg-zP_M8uZsQQGH09TxmBY73v23zpyr0/edit#gid=1505554870

When looking at this spreadsheet, put together by PEN America, I am proud to not see Vermont listed as a state considering similar legislation. I also wonder, if there is not already legislation confirming First Amendment Rights of Intellectual Freedom, or at the very least a legislative proclamation affirming the importance of the Freedom to Read Statement by the VT Legislature, that the State of Vermont lawmakers, should consider passing something.

Sincerely,

Amy Olsen

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