



MICHIGAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Script & Tips for Delivering a Strong Message on Book Banning/Censorship at Board Meetings

Tips for speeches at board meetings:

- Make sure you ask to be listed on the agenda
- Try to memorize and not read from the script
- Practice, practice, practice – most public comments are 3-5 minutes. Find out how long they will give you to speak.
- Be on time to listen to the entire conversation and get a feel for the tenor/tone of the conversation.
- Speak to the board, not to the other members of the audience.
- Be prepared to answer questions from the board.
- Keep politics out of the conversation – we don't want to alienate – just share facts.
- Share the legal precedent for first amendment rights – print this out and be prepared to hand them a copy if needed - https://www.michigan.gov/libraryofmichigan/-/media/Project/Websites/libraryofmichigan/For-Libraries/Administration/Library-Law/Other/Book_Challenges_Censorship_Michigan_Public_Libraries_742861_7.pdf?rev=248b7ebfd62746e2b15c85da66a8481e
- Know how to define pornography and explain why the materials don't meet the bar for pornography
- If there is a recording of the meeting, please send to MLA.

Introduce yourself by name, title, library/organization, city and what you do

Today, I'm here to offer support for the (Library Name) as it faces a difficult decision related to the library's collection.

Challenges to library materials are nothing new, but the recent uptick in challenges across the country include some alarming trends. While challenges are often raised by local residents and library patrons, they're part of a movement across the country that's funded by partisan political donors. Now that doesn't mean local challenges are not sincere. But it does bring partisan politics into a historically nonpartisan organization.

The (Library Name) is required to employ a Library Director that holds a Master's Degree in Library and Information Science. That degree program includes coursework that qualifies graduates to develop collections that meet the broad and varied interests of all community members. This is a core tenant of librarianship – to provide for the interests of all residents, and to do so without bias, as your professional librarians are trusted to do every day.

Your board-approved Collection Development Policy delegates this work to the Library Director, and clearly states that individuals "...cannot restrict the freedom of others to read, listen and view within the guidelines set forth..." in that policy.

Perhaps most important to note when considering material challenges is the Supreme Court precedent on this topic. In a 1982 case the Supreme Court determined that content-based removal of certain books from a school library was a violation of student's first amendment rights. In public libraries, where there is little recognized authority to restrict access to information, the bar against content-based removal is even more clear. Simply put, if you decide as a board to remove materials from the collection based on subject matter, you're putting the library at risk when it comes to potential lawsuits, considering the established illegality of that action. [\(The Supreme Court case: Island Trees Union Free School District v Pico\)](#)

Public libraries are tasked with upholding the constitutional promise to protect intellectual freedom as outlined in the first amendment. This is a constitutional issue, and public libraries align squarely with the law and legal precedent. Unless the material is considered legally obscene, you cannot remove it from the collection based on subject matter. Obscenity laws are clear, and if you can buy it in the open market, from a library vendor or from Amazon, it is not obscene. While some people may find the title or a portion of its contents objectionable, you do not have the legal right to restrict every other community member's access to the material.

Good public servants like you want to solve the problems constituents bring to them. And to serve the whole community, including folks who see value in material that you may find objectionable, your community members need you to uphold the first amendment rights that are enshrined in the constitution.