

Defunding the library is short sighted and punishes, irreparably, the entire community who count on the programs and services a library provides. The Jamestown library board and community face many difficult decisions in the coming year. When the decision is made to close and lock the library doors, everyone – those that voted no, those that voted yes, and those that did not vote – will lose access to a place to read, gather, socialize, study, vote and learn.

This vote was accompanied by alarming and dangerous anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and a rise in book bans and censorship attempts throughout Michigan and our country. Of utmost importance to any public library is curating collections that allow every citizen to see themselves and the world around them in the diversity of books and resources their library provides for all ages, all abilities, all interests, all races, all nationalities, all religions, the rich, the poor, the traditional and nontraditional families, those who identify as LGBTQ+ and those that don't. This is a core tenant of librarianship – to provide for the interests of all, and to do so without bias. For countless individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and who face bullying, isolation and depression, access to LGBTQ+ representation and information in books from the library offers them a safe haven and in some cases is lifesaving. It is critically important that everyone has access to books where they can see themselves, validate their existence and experiences and reinforce their self-worth.

In addition, impinging on the right to read freely is a violation of the First Amendment to our Constitution. Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan, writing for the plurality about the unconstitutional removal of books in *Island Trees vs. Pico* in 1982, agrees, “Our Constitution does not permit the official suppression of ideas.” Attempting to force a library to remove books based on content is advocating for the suppression of ideas by a public entity. Individuals have the right and responsibility to make decisions about what materials are suitable for themselves and for their own families. Period. No one has the right to make rules restricting what other people read, or to make decisions for other families.

The Michigan Library Association stands in solidarity with the current trustees at the Patmos Library as they uphold the First Amendment and fulfill their ethical responsibility by guaranteeing and facilitating access to all expressions of knowledge and intellectual activity, including those which some individuals in our society may consider to be unconventional, unpopular, or unacceptable. We must all work together to give all citizens space to think critically, explore ideas and engage in civil discourse.

MLA continues to stand strong as champions of access and in protecting the Constitutional rights of Michigan citizens to freely exercise their right to read.