STATEMENT FROM THE UTAH LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
IN SUPPORT OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS

The Utah Library Association, founded in 1912 and representing thousands of librarians and library workers across the state, stands with parents, teachers, and school librarians in advocating for the health, well-being, and safety of all students.

We strongly support local school boards in the creation and following of policies that ensure that school libraries have materials that support the Utah Core Standards for education. The Utah Core Standards identify a number of roles for School Libraries, including helping students: 1) read to pursue intellectual, personal, and emotional growth for life, and 2) make personal connections while respecting the right to read, seek information, and speak freely.

The Core Standards for Grades 6-12 specify that “Libraries support independent readers by providing a variety of materials for informational and leisure reading,” and that “Reading extensively strengthens stamina and broadens students’ global perspective. The goal is to recognize individual students’ interests and needs and provide materials in a variety of formats, genres, and languages, at varied reading levels."

The Standards further state that “Students need the lifelong skills of selecting information from a wide variety of sources . . . preparing them for learning, doing, and problem solving in college, career and throughout life.”

To ensure that school libraries support the “inquiry-based learning” that statewide standards call for, it is imperative that school library collections continue to provide access to materials that reflect a variety of thoughts, perspectives, and experiences. The targeted elimination of materials that reflect the authorship or experiences of anyone based on their race, gender, or sexual orientation is not only illegal, it puts Utah students at a disadvantage academically and in the job market by failing to provide an education that prepares them for success in an increasingly diverse and global economy.
We support policies that provide reasonable opportunities for parents to speak with teachers and librarians about what is appropriate for their child. And we champion prudent procedures that allow for “requests for reconsideration” when there is concern that a book may not be age-appropriate. Most libraries have had these time-tested policies in place for a century, and librarians have strong records of listening and working with parents in taking appropriate actions in a respectful and responsive manner.

Following the rules when library books are questioned—rules which are passed by a Board in an open, public, transparent, and consultative manner—protects the constitutional freedoms of all parents and students, and also safeguards due process, ensuring that no one parent, group of parents, or administrator can substitute their personal preferences, biases, or political agenda for the legitimate policies that exist to support official statewide school standards and the success of all students.

School librarians are literary arbiters that curate their collections based on such legitimate policies, professional reviews, and award lists. This includes literature that reflects painful parts of human experience, including violence, abuse, and discrimination. To be clear, pornographic material is not reviewed for selection as these items only appeal to the “prurient interest” of readers, and lack serious literary, scientific, or artistic value. Labeling literature that addresses issues of race, abuse, gender, or sexual orientation as “pornographic” or “obscene” fails to meet any state or federal standards, and harms our students, limiting their ability to understand and navigate the world.

And helping students prepare for success in the world is what school librarians do. There is a great deal of research that shows that students thrive academically in the presence of a well-staffed, professionally run school library and that the effect is strongest for vulnerable and at-risk students. School librarians help students develop a love of reading and inquiry, and as well as develop 21st century literacy skills such as critical thinking, which enables them to identify, find, evaluate, and use information and ideas effectively and ethically, now and in the future.

The Utah Library Association supports the Supreme Court’s recognition that libraries are places for voluntary inquiry and should contain a world of ideas and experiences, even if some of those ideas and experiences might be uncomfortable for some. We urge parents, teachers, school librarians, and administrators to engage in community conversations and follow established collection development and reconsideration policies, as well as state and federal laws, to ensure the health, well-being, safety, and success of all students in Utah.