



DATE: July 17, 2023

SUBJECT: North Shelby Library Display Statement

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In June, the North Shelby Library received both positive and negative attention regarding a display in the Children's Department showcasing books for LGBTQ Pride Month. I would like to address this and the broader tenets of libraries.

North Shelby Library's mission is to serve all citizens in the District. We adhere to the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment by following the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights and Freedom to Read statement. These are reflected in our own supportive program policy which states, "Socially excluded, marginalized, and underrepresented people, not just the mainstream majority, should be able to see themselves reflected in the resources and programs that libraries offer." The collection and displays are intended to serve groups of people throughout the entire community. Removing displays or designating certain subjects to less visible areas of the library or department is a form of censorship. Moving books meant for children to the adult section creates barriers to access. LGBTQ people and families are part of our community and should be afforded the basic rights, respect, and dignities of every human.

The Library creates displays to provide easy access to materials that people may be searching for because of current events, popularity, holidays, or national celebrations. These displays also help make sure all patrons see themselves and their families represented in the library and have ready access to the information that they need. The Library changes displays monthly and has had a Pride display in all departments for thirteen years. We have not received complaints about these displays in the past. As a professional librarian, I can attest that the display included age-appropriate materials about families of all kinds, love, kindness, being yourself, and LGBTQ+ history. Many of the books featured were winners or honor books of the American Library Association's *Stonewall Award* for children.

Of the more than 8,600 people who visited the library in June 2023, only about 1% expressed an opinion about the display. We received 76 supportive written comments and 39 negative written comments. At the Board meeting on June 19, 2023, more people signed up to speak in support of the display than against. I would also like to note that the number of visitors to the library in June increased by more than 3,000 from last year, and Summer Reading participation in June and July is also up over last year.

The responsibility for the choice of library materials minors can check out rests with their parents or legal guardians. Because of its suburban location, the North Shelby Library is not accessible to children unless they have adult transportation, and young children visiting the children's area must be accompanied by a responsible caregiver. Picture books are usually read to children and often deal with difficult topics such as death or divorce because they help parents start hard discussions. Library staff are ready to assist patrons who want to find books that are appropriate for their families.

In conclusion, public libraries exist to provide information and access to all. We do not censor. We do not promote. We make a variety of information and services available and ask our patrons to respect that differences exist among us.