



LIBRARIES

Orange City, Iowa

A conservative group requested the removal of *A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo* by Jill Twiss from the Orange City Public Library in October. The library board voted to retain the book.

The picture book's storyline tells of two male bunnies falling in love, and a group named Sioux City Conservatives argued that it pushed a same-sex agenda. The book was challenged shortly after a separate Christian group burned copies of other LGBTQ that were in the Orange County Library.

Reported in: *Siouxland Proud*, October 23.

Rumford, Maine

A display of banned books, the source of much Facebook debate in early September, will remain at the Rumford Public Library, according to the library's board of trustees.

Seventy people gathered September 11 in the Children's Room at the library to debate the display, which three members of the local clergy said in a letter to trustees was not appropriate for a public library serving the families and people of the River Valley.

The message from the audience was one of acceptance and diversity.

The two-page letter was received September 6 by Rumford Library Director Tamara Butler, signed by Dan Pearson, pastor of the Rumford Baptist Church; Justin Thacker, pastor of Praise Assembly of God, and the Rev. Nathan March of Parish of the Holy Savior.

Pearson, who was present with Thacker, opened the discussion. "I do want to apologize for some of the wording in the letter," he said. "I did not want to alienate the gay community."

He said they thought their letter would be presented to the board of trustees. "I think it was unfortunate it was posted publicly, before we had a chance to have a discussion with this small group or to revise some things in it that created some of the hoopla," Pearson said.

"None of us that signed that are interested in banning or destroying any books. I don't know how that rumor got started. There was concern because a few of the books on the banned book display, front and center, were displaying sexual themes that we thought were not appropriate for children, especially displayed prominently up front, when they're coming in there."

The display coincides with national Banned Books Week, September 23-29, celebrating the freedom to read and highlighting books that often draw challenges in schools and libraries.

Half the books on this year's list of the Top Ten Banned Books (composed by the American Library Association) tell stories with LGBTQ characters.

Debbie Carver, a Mountain Valley High School teacher, said she agreed with the part of the clergy's letter that indicated that the library should not be "promoting values that contribute to the community, and should not be promoting a certain religious view, set of morals or political views over and against another."

"That is why we're all here, for that. Then when the letter gets into things like homosexuality, that's where I think a lot of us have an issue. I'm not going to tell you what to believe. I don't want to tell you how to raise your kids. Just like I don't want you to tell me how to raise my kids," she said.

Thacker said he felt the display was in an area that was not age appropriate for children.

"All this was to make a suggestion. You can take it or leave it. It was not meant to be a firestorm," he noted.

Pastor Cindy Christie said she was asked by her congregation at the Rumford Point Congregational Church to be at this meeting to say, "We support the library."

Each month, the Rumford Public Library has a themed book display.

Librarian Mary Ann Fournier said, "I've been coming to this library just about every day since I was 5 years old, and I now work here."

June was Pride Month, and as a member of the LGBTQ community, she did a pride display.

"I had *Two Boys Kissing* and *My Lesbian Experience with Loneliness* on that display (books also on the banned books display)," she said. "My question is why didn't anyone come to me and complain in June?"

"And you want me to hide the LGBTQ books that are like bibles to some of these children. Some of these books are stolen by some of these LGBTQ teens because they don't want their parents to know they're checking them out," she said.

Mitzi Sequoia said the gay pride display was the first time since she moved to Rumford in 1996 that "anyone ever even acknowledged the gay community or alternate lifestyles."

After trustee Chairwoman Carolyn Kennard closed the 105-minute discussion, people slowly began to exit the room. Those who stayed for the next 15 minutes heard trustees Kennard, Jane Shuck, Linda Macgregor, Maureen Cook, and Jerrold Cohen vote unanimously to leave the banned books display intact.

Prior to the meeting, library director Tamara Butler said she had not acted to take down the display herself



because “if anyone reads the American Library Association’s Freedom to Read, we are not to avoid controversial subjects. Those books are perfectly appropriate for a banned book display. We did it before, and other libraries do it. The display is to remind people of the freedom to read, lack of censorship . . . that’s the reason for it,” she said. Reported in: *Lewiston Sun Journal*, September 17.

Wausau, Wisconsin

The Marathon County Public Library will not move a book on transgender issues out of the children’s section, as requested by a patron. A committee voted to keep *Who Are You? The Kids’ Guide to Gender Identity* by Brook Pessin-Whedbee where it currently sits instead of moving it to the adult guidance area.

“The book itself is for children who might be working with their parents through their own gender identity issues,” said Marathon County Public Library Director Ralph Illick.

The issue was brought forward by a concerned citizen and taken up by a panel put together by Illick. He says the library has a formal process it follows in these situations, which includes background research and analyzing professional reviews on the book. They also investigated similar challenges of the book at other libraries and read the book themselves.

After the process was completed, Illick says they came to the conclusion that the book was properly placed. He added that the book is considered an excellent resource on the topic of gender identity for both young adults who may be experiencing questions about their own identity and their parents.

He does feel that the book is a good fit for a public library because it can serve as a resource for someone

who may be questioning their own gender identity.

“We want to make sure we have materials here that are appropriate for everyone,” meaning he doesn’t want to see the library carrying materials that only agree with one viewpoint or another. “Public libraries are secular; the intention is never to be provocative, but to be informative.”

Illick said the person issuing the complaint did not want to ban the book altogether or have it removed from the system, they just felt the book wasn’t appropriate for the children’s section.

He added that libraries are always prepared for challenges such as this, but it’s not a plan he has often seen put into action. “I’ve been in libraries for 35 years, and I’ve probably dealt with five of these [cases] in that time.” Reported in: WSAU Radio, September 18.

SCHOOLS Shorewood, Wisconsin

A student show based on Harper Lee’s novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* was cancelled but quickly rescheduled at Shorewood High School near Milwaukee in October.

The school district also scheduled a series of events where “supporters of the cancellation and supporters of the performance” could engage in “difficult conversations about race and racial inequities as a way to improve our schools and our village.” In an email to parents, the district added that it “should have done more outreach to dialogue about the sensitivity of this performance with the Shorewood and greater Milwaukee community.” Moving forward, the district promised to “continue to encourage staff and students to engage in meaningful performances surrounding contemporary issues with the appropriate amount of outreach and dialogue.”

Reported in: onmilwaukee.com, October 14.

PRISONS Maryland

Maryland prison officials have reversed a statewide policy that limited access to books for thousands of inmates as part of an effort to reduce drug smuggling. Prisoners can immediately begin receiving book shipments directly from relatives and online retailers, according to Public Safety and Correctional Services Secretary Stephen T. Moyer. The corrections department on Monday also lifted its constraints on how often inmates can order through prison-approved vendors.

Prison officials had put new book-ordering restrictions in place in April, the *Washington Post* reported, as a response to the high volume of drugs being trafficked into state facilities, including in the pages of books.

The decision to rescind the policy came after criticism from lawmakers, inmates, and their families. The American Civil Liberties Union characterized the restrictions as an unconstitutional, “virtual book ban” in a letter last month to corrections department leaders.

State officials initially defended the policy that restricted inmates to ten book purchases every three months from two vendors that distributed paper catalogs. Inmate advocates who contacted the *Washington Post* expressed concern about the limited selection of titles and the cost.

Federal prison officials scrapped similar book-ordering restrictions in May after inquiries from the *Post*. Those limits were in place at federal facilities in Virginia and California and were set to start in Florida. The federal procedures limited book orders to three vendors and included a 30 percent markup.



In responding to the ACLU on June 11, Maryland officials provided new details about the ways in which books have been used to smuggle drugs into state facilities. Prison investigators have struggled to stop the flow of thin, clear strips of Suboxone, an FDA-approved medication that helps opiate addicts manage withdrawal symptoms. Since 2015, investigators have uncovered 660 strips in books in 44 individual cases and discovered book vendors working with inmates to smuggle drugs, according to the letter. Reported in: *Washington Post*, June 11.

Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC)—which in September announced it would put a halt to book donation programs and mail-order books and publications—has revised its policy, allowing book orders to resume through a new centralized processing center.

“It was really public pressure, we believe, that led to the DOC updating their policy to allow us to again send books directly to inmates,” said Jodi Lincoln, an organizer with Book ’Em, a book donation program based in Pittsburgh.

The prohibition was part of a wide-ranging security crackdown meant to eliminate drug smuggling into the prisons, in particular paper soaked in synthetic cannabinoids, also known as K2. Under that policy, the DOC limited book orders to a catalog of 8,500 e-books that was plagued by high prices and vast gaps in its coverage, and to requests placed on kiosks within the prison system that turned out to be inadequate to the task.

According to the DOC, 2,500 orders were placed on the kiosks, but half were for non-book-related matters and many others were for magazines, which could not be processed

on the system. In many requests, inmates did not provide sufficiently detailed information for staff to identify which books they were seeking.

In a statement, Corrections Secretary John Wetzel said the new procedure was a response to criticisms by book-donation groups.

“This policy update allows inmates to have direct contact with book donation organizations through a security processing center and ensures that publications will not be used as a path by which drugs are introduced into our facilities,” he said.

The new policy also allows family and friends to order books to be shipped directly from publishers or bookstores to a secure processing center in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania, where staff will screen books five days per week. It also enables inmates to place orders directly from a hard-copy catalog.

Lincoln said the book-donation groups still have concerns about how the new process will play out, including how the DOC will ensure the packages reach the inmates who requested them, intact with all supplemental materials.

“There are also concerns over the non-bound materials we send in—zines, resource guides, pamphlets—we want to make sure those publications can also get through,” Lincoln said.

The DOC noted that inmates will continue to have access to libraries that average about 15,000 titles each, though some inmates say that they find it difficult to make it to the library and prefer not to check out books for fear of being disciplined over late returns.

Sean Damon of Amistad Law Project, which led protests over the book prohibition, expressed relief. “From our perspective, it looks like the DOC did the right thing,” Damon said.

But, he added, he’s not satisfied, as other new security measures—including the scanning and surveillance of incoming mail and the photocopying of inmate legal mail—remain in place. “It begs the question as to why mail has to be sent to Florida, scanned into a searchable database, and the copy sent on,” he said. “Books are many, many pieces of paper. Why do they have to photocopy a letter when they can let 300 pages in?” Reported in: www2philly.com, November 2.

INTERNATIONAL Geneva, Switzerland

A medical or psychological argument sometimes used to justify censorship has again been debunked. “Pornography addiction” is actually not recognized by any national or international diagnostic manual.

With the publication of the latest *International Classification of Diseases* (version 11) in June, the World Health Organization once again decided not to recognize sex-film viewing as a disorder.

“Pornography viewing” was considered for inclusion in the “problematic internet use” category, but WHO decided against its inclusion because of the lack of available evidence for this disorder. (“Based on the limited current data, it would therefore seem premature to include it in the ICD-11,” the organization wrote.) The common American standard, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, made the same decision in their latest version as well; there is no listing for porn addiction in DSM-5.

Journalists covering this area have struggled to find good, evidence-based information on the reality of porn addiction. Anti-pornography groups have been well-funded, including by state governments. Scientists and clinicians who



present evidence that challenges these harm-focused narratives face serious social and political opposition to their research. It can be tough for this information to make it to the public.

In his series *How Not to F*ck Up Your Kids Too Bad*, Stephen Marche described his experience as a journalist commissioned by two different outlets to write about the risks of pornography: When he could not find good evidence to demonize porn, “the editors killed it. What they wanted was to be scary.”

Amazingly, the first nationally representative peer-reviewed study on sex-film viewing was not published until in 2017 in Australia. This study found that 84 percent of men and 54 percent of women had ever viewed sexual material. Overall, 3.69 percent of men (144 of 3,923) and 0.65 percent of women (28 of 4,218) in the study believed that they were “addicted” to pornography, and only half of this group reported that using pornography had any negative impact on their lives. This was without any clinical interview to assess why they

thought they were addicted to porn, which could have ruled out scenarios in which a spouse or church told them that they were addicted when they did not personally hold this view.

In the latest version of the ICD, the World Health Organization has shown surprising restraint in excluding porn addiction and sex addiction—particularly given its history of pathologizing sexuality by including “homosexual behavior” and “nymphomania” in the past. Reported in: slate.com, July 30