

# FONCPL Advocacy Kit

## Responding to Freedom to Read Challenges

We, the Friends of the North Carolina Public Libraries, urge Friends groups to take a stand on book banning and censorship at public libraries. We offer this material for those interested in preserving our Freedom to Read. Keep in mind that the challenges might not only be about book titles, they may also include library displays, programs, and speakers.

### **PART 1 – Communities that have not been faced with book challenges should consider taking these proactive steps: Educate, Communicate, Document, Participate**

#### **Educate**

- Educate yourself and your Friends about censorship, challenges, and banning. Be aware of what is happening around the country. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.
- Understand how your library is legally structured. Who makes the funding decisions? Who makes the management decisions? Your library is in one of three systems: regional, county, or municipal.
- Know your library's policies and procedures on the following:
  - Adding a book to the collection
  - Informal requests to remove a book
  - Formal challenge to remove a book
  - Reconsideration process to remove a book.
- Always use Banned Books Week to educate the public about intellectual freedom and the right to read.
- Become familiar with the NC Open Meetings Law; [Click here for a copy of the law.](#) Every unit of local government is required to abide by this law—that includes regional governmental entities like regional libraries.
- Educate and prepare your book sale/shop volunteers to respond to challenges posed by customers or program attendees (Remember, you are not going to change a challenger's mind—try to avoid confrontation.)

#### **Communicate**

- As a regular part of your communication with your Friends Board and your members, provide information on what is happening around the state and around the country regarding libraries and book challenges.
- Keep a positive, open, ongoing dialogue with your library director or manager. Ask them to keep you informed of any developing challenges or other issues that might impact the library or the Friends. Strategize with them. Make sure they know your advocacy plan. Best to either call them or meet with them in person as emails and text messages are public records.
- Develop positive messages about the library. Do press releases to remind the public about the many benefits of their library.
- Display "Freedom to Read" posters and posters supporting the library at Friends book sales and in bookstores

### **Communicate, continued**

- Don't reinvent the wheel! There are lots of models to choose from—but we caution you to be sure to personalize the message—make it your own.
- Keep your message positive and accurate:
  - Provide facts.
  - Be careful quoting ALA and United for Libraries as the opposition may use that against you. Best to find other sources.
  - Publicly praise the library staff, library trustees, regional board trustees, and elected officials who are upholding the rights of citizens to choose reading material for themselves and their children and ensuring that the libraries curate their collections to be diverse and inclusive.

### **Document**

- Make your Friends either a 3-ring notebook or electronic copy with all pertinent information and copies of documents that you might need to reference.
- Prepare statements in advance of the need. You could use ones from the ALA and other sources, but be sure to personalize them for your group and your circumstances.
- Make a list of all the concerned groups who will be making decisions regarding the library: Name, members, contact information for the members, meeting schedule, and information. Keep this info updated.
- Create an action plan to put in place should it be needed. You will not be as effective if you have to cobble something together at the last minute.
- Maintain information about your opponents:
  - Get their names. If they spoke at a public meeting, generally they have to sign up to do so. Take a picture of the signup sheet. When they speak, they have to identify themselves as they begin—write down the name.
  - Google their names.
  - Create a dossier on each. Are they local or are they outsiders brought in to cause trouble?
  - Keep track of their activities (e.g., speaking out at meetings).
  - If possible, get copies of statement they have made at public meetings.
  - Analyze the arguments they present and develop strategies to address.

### **Participate**

- If your community is served by print media (newspaper) or TV, identify key reporters and develop a rapport with them, so that if an issue arises, they might contact you for comment. Putting a press kit together in advance of the need for the issue is a good idea.
- Have a Friends of the Library representative show up at every local or regional library board of trustee meeting (if you have one). If you find out that someone has signed up to speak in the public comment period on this topic, the Friends rep attending the meeting should also sign up to speak—read a statement that has been prepared in advance.
- If you are in a county or municipal system, review the agenda for commissioner/alderman meetings. If the library is on the agenda—show up. If you find out that someone has signed up to speak in the public comment period on this topic, the Friends rep attending the meeting should also sign up to speak—read a statement that has been prepared in advance.
- Get on the list of those to be notified of meetings and to receive agendas (most local governments will permit this)
- If possible, ask someone passionate about defending the public's intellectual freedom to coordinate your advocacy efforts.

**PART 2 – Communities that are facing book challenges may find the following resources helpful:**

**[Unite Against Book Bans Tool Kit from United for Libraries ALA](#)**

(Includes information related to talking about book bans, contacting elected officials, petitioning decision makers, communicating with others and spreading the word, creating email/newsletter copy, and sharing on social media; the pdf contains numerous templates and examples.)

**[Challenges to Materials and Programs: The Role of Friends of the Library \(United for Libraries\)](#)**

(Provides suggestions and information related to the roles of Friends groups and the ways Friends can support the Library Director and staff prior to, or during, a challenge.)

**[Book Riot Article: Methods and Tools for Combatting Censorship in Your Community](#)**

(Provides information and suggestions about voting in local elections, serving on boards, attending relevant meetings, writing letters to key decision makers, talking to the press, correcting misinformation, submitting materials requests, reporting on hate groups, and donating money.)

**[Everylibrary: How Are We Fighting Against Book Banning?](#)**

(Everylibrary is the National Political Action Committee for libraries. They assist communities that are facing book bans and challenges by providing assistance, information, and monetary funding. The article contains a petition to sign and provides information about emailing State Representatives. It also documents recent stories of communities and libraries that have successfully responded to challenges.)

**[Attempts to Ban Books Pre-emptively](#)**

(It's not just about banning books that are actually in libraries—this article discusses a group's attempt to ban books pre-emptively.)

**Do not take for granted the freedoms given to you. The fact is, those working to actively censor materials are working to take rights and freedoms away.**

**PART 3 – Communities that are facing challenges specifically to books for children and youth may find the following resources helpful:**

### [Book Bans and Their Impact on Young People and Society](#)

(This article by the ADL provides historical context related to book bans and identifies the top 10 most banned books. It also provides a list of questions for starting a conversation and for digging deeper, and it suggests a list of action items for responding to challenges or book bans, especially challenges to books for children and youth. The following is an excerpt from the article:

Books for young people should serve [as both mirrors and windows](#) to reflect and represent children and people in our society and world. This helps young people see themselves and feel valued (mirrors) and provides opportunities to learn about the experiences of people who are different than they are (windows). Over the last ten years, there has been progress in the [publishing of more diverse books](#) and by authors who represent that diversity. However, this pattern of challenging and banning books by authors of color and LGBTQ+ authors threatens those important advances.)

### [Teens Today Spend More Time on Digital Media, Less Time Reading](#)

### [Combatting "Child Grooming" Rhetoric](#)

### [How Sex Education Books Protect Kids and Teens](#)

(The three articles linked above all provide information for combatting the rhetoric around books and libraries being used to groom children and teens. The articles address concepts such as the following:

- How the “grooming” argument can be turned around and used against books not on the challenged books list. For example: Do books about bullying groom children to become bullies? Do books about the prejudices faced by children with disabilities groom other children to hate the disabled?
- The actual definition of “grooming” and how difficult it would be to use a book to “groom” anyone
- The rights of parents to decide what is appropriate reading material for their own children
- The real sources of information most commonly used by children and teens: social media, streaming, cell phones, the internet, other kids
- The statistics on how much time children and teens actually spend reading and how many books they are likely to read in a year (spoiler alert: the numbers are dismally small and getting worse. Perhaps energy might be better spent addressing how little children and teens read. Are we grooming a generation of non-readers?)