



September 19, 2022

Statement from the Oregon Library Association and the Oregon Intellectual Freedom Committee

RE: Medford School District Removal of “The Handmaid’s Tale: The Graphic Novel” – OIFC review and findings

This statement comes from the Oregon Library Association (OLA) and the Oregon Intellectual Freedom Committee (OIFC). The Oregon Library Association (OLA) is a professional organization of Oregon library workers and includes the Oregon Intellectual Freedom Committee. The OIFC provides expertise and support for intellectual freedom issues on behalf of the Oregon Library Association and is the professional committee with the charges to support intellectual freedom and to respond to censorship. The OLA in combination with OIFC supports Oregon school and public libraries in managing challenges to materials within their library collections.

The OIFC has been involved in reviewing a formal complaint from a parent at the Medford School District (MSD). Through this complaint, MSD removed all copies of [The Handmaid’s Tale: The Graphic Novel \[edition\]](#) in early April 2022 following what appears to be a hastily convened Reconsideration Committee meeting.

In order to gain a better understanding of these events, OIFC exchanged multiple communications with the Medford School District in an attempt to gain information about the decision process used to remove the book. After reviewing the information provided, OIFC has found that the district is without sound or formal review policies for reconsideration of library materials, and that the removal of access to this content amounts to censorship. Specifically, OIFC finds MSD’s process and policies are lacking in the following ways:

1. Failure to prepare an objective policy for reconsideration of library materials;
2. Lack of transparency regarding the policies MSD has followed to review school library materials;
3. Lack of transparency in objective review criteria;
4. Lack of transparency in the review committee make-up and objective decision making authority;
5. Lack of authority for the review committee to make the final decision on the reconsideration;

6. Failure to acknowledge that the graphic novel format is an important learning tool for students with reading difficulties or learning disabilities and that in removing this format in favor of retaining the book version, creates an undue barrier to access of materials for students with disabilities;
7. Failure to offer an appeal process to the decision; and
8. Failure to communicate policy decisions and impact to school district stakeholders.

It is therefore the OIFC's recommendation to MSD to establish, without delay, the following policies and guidelines:

1. Collection Development and Materials Selection Policy for School Library Materials. This should include at a minimum:
 - a. Objective criteria for selection of library materials
 - b. Acknowledgement that different formats or materials are needed to meet different learning and reading skills and needs.
 - c. A statement acknowledging the intellectual freedom rights of their stakeholders
 - d. Objective criteria for the deselection of library materials
 - e. Assigning of decision making authority for materials selection to the appropriate parties
2. Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials Policy. This should include at a minimum the following:
 - a. Process for stakeholders to submit a formal request for review
 - b. Timeline for responding to the request
 - c. Committee make-up for reviewing the request documents
 - d. Committee decision making authority for responding to the request documents
 - e. Committee objective standards for reviewing materials
 - f. Committee standards should match Collection Development and Materials Selection Policy criteria
 - g. Procedures for addressing a standstill in committee review decision
 - h. Procedures for stakeholders to submit an appeal to the final decision
 - i. Timeline for stakeholders to request a second review of title
 - j. Timeline between review decision and future collection development and materials selection decisions
3. Transparency in decision making including but not limited to:
 - a. Clear and open communication with requesting parties
 - b. Allowing for waivers to public records request to review MSD transparency in decision-making.
 - c. Clear reporting of the case including: objective establishment of case facts, review process and objective decision making.

It is further recommended by the OIFC to MSD to post all policies and procedures on their website for public transparency and retrieval, and to make print copies freely available when requested. It is recommended that fair selection and withdrawal criteria exist that do not create unequal access to information for students with learning disabilities or reading difficulties. Finally, it is recommended by the OIFC to MSD to follow these established guidelines objectively and with full consistency.

In closing, the OIFC holds that MSD did not have clear, objective or consistently applied policies or procedures for the determination to remove “The Handmaid’s Tale: the Graphic Novel edition” from their library collections. OIFC found that MSD removed the title without objective merit, without established policies or guidelines and without the ability for appeals from the community. OIFC found that the removal of the graphic novel version created an undue barrier in access to materials for students with disabilities. Based on the circulation statistics regarding this title, it is clear that this title was of interest and value to MSD community and the removal of access to this content amounts to censorship.

As provided by the American Library Association’s definition of censorship, the ALA shares the following:

“Censorship is the suppression of ideas and information that some individuals, groups, or government officials find objectionable or dangerous. Would-be censors try to use the power of the state to impose their view of what is truthful and appropriate, or offensive and objectionable, on everyone else. Censors pressure public institutions, like libraries, to suppress and remove information they judge inappropriate or dangerous from public access, so that no one else has the chance to read or view the material and make up their own minds about it. The censor wants to prejudge materials for everyone. It is no more complicated than someone saying, “Don’t let anyone read this book, or buy that magazine, or view that film, because I object to it!” <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/censorship>

If any MSD stakeholder, including MSD student, parent, teacher, volunteer, staff member, or parent association would like to take further action regarding this and future material review policies and decisions, please contact the following:

- Bret Champion, Superintendent, Medford School District, Bret.Champion@medford.k12.or.us
- Jeanne Grazioli, Deputy Superintendent, Medford School District, Jeanne.Grazioli@medford.k12.or.us
- Jodi Fahy, Senior Executive Assistant to the Superintendent and the School Board, Medford School District, jodi.fahy@medford.k12.or.us
- Medford School District Board, msdschoolboard@medford.k12.or.us

If any MSD community member has been personally impacted by the MSD decision to remove this material and feels their civil liberties have been impacted, please contact:

- ACLU of Oregon legal team at intake@aclu-or.org

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OIFC Co-Chairs 2021-2022

OLA President, 2021-22

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