



WISCONSIN
LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION

Wisconsin Library Association Statement on the Freedom to Read and Intellectual Freedom

The Wisconsin Library Association affirms its support of personal liberty, the freedom to read, and intellectual freedom for people across Wisconsin.

The Freedom to Read

Over 130 years ago, the Wisconsin Library Association (WLA) formed to support the establishment of public libraries in the state. Today, our membership represents a wide range of libraries that serve a variety of communities – from college campuses to corporations, rural villages to urban areas, and more. Just as our state motto is “Forward,” WLA and Wisconsin libraries are steadfast in supporting our communities as they move forward in education, business, and life enrichment.

Libraries have grown and changed since the 1800s, but their primary mission remains the same: to ensure all people can exercise their right to intellectual freedom and the freedom to read. The First Amendment’s right to freedom of expression encompasses intellectual freedom, which includes an individual’s right to receive information on a wide range of topics from a variety of viewpoints. Publicly funded libraries play an important role in facilitating this free and open access to information. ¹

We know that our families and community members have varying interests, hobbies, and beliefs. What one person selects to use from their local library for themselves, or for their family, is an exercise of their personal liberty, their freedom to read, and their intellectual freedom. To meet the broad and varied needs of Wisconsinites, libraries and library staff work diligently to build exceptional collections that represent the stories and interests of all Wisconsinites.

Supporting the Freedom to Read with Policies and Standards

Every library in Wisconsin should have a materials selection policy, approved by their administrating body, which includes a formal process for the reconsideration of library materials. We remind administrators, boards, municipal leadership, librarians, and communities that the reconsideration and removal of library materials must be done in accordance with

¹ J. Haydel, ‘Libraries and Intellectual Freedom’, *The First Amendment Encyclopedia*, 2009, <https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/1125/libraries-and-intellectual-freedom>, (access 7 JUNE 2022)

administratively approved policies. Such formal processes promote the Constitutional values of transparent governance and free speech and ensure local control over community institutions.

When someone requests that a library item be reconsidered, libraries should follow the approved policies for completing an objective review of the material. The removal of library materials without due process inhibits libraries' ability to provide comprehensive and inclusive collections for their full community. Banning, removing, or censoring material violates the community's right to intellectual freedom and the freedom to read.

The Wisconsin Library Association recommends that libraries, boards, and other decision makers:

- Follow library-approved policies when responding to requests to reconsider library materials.
- Consult with their library administrators and librarians when reviewing requests for reconsideration.
- Utilize the expertise of their librarians and library professionals in making collection decisions that will impact all library users.

As we have for over 130 years, WLA and its members will continue to support personal liberty, the freedom to read, and intellectual freedom for people across Wisconsin.

For additional resources and more information about the Wisconsin Library Association, please visit <https://www.wisconsinlibraries.org>.