

# Library has vital role in guarding freedom of information

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November 21, 2021 12:00 AM

ImagineIF Libraries is in the spotlight for a couple of books in its adult collection that seem inappropriate to some.

After a video of a parent at a Texas school board meeting went viral, public libraries across the country — including ImagineIF — have received requests to have two books removed from the library system: “Gender Queer: A Memoir,” a graphic novel about gender identify, and “Lawn Boy,” a semi-autobiographical coming-of-age novel criticized for its sexual content.

Interim Library Director Martha Furman has addressed the matter head-on, establishing a committee to review the removal requests, each lodged formally as a Citizen Comment on Library Material. “Gender Queer” is currently under review, Furman said, and “Lawn Boy” will be reviewed once the book, which is currently checked out, is returned to the library.

Furman also posted a lengthy, thoughtful letter to the community on the ImagineIF Libraries Facebook page, explaining that the library is obligated to provide a wide range of views, “including those that may be considered unorthodox or unpopular.”

She noted it’s her responsibility to protect the public’s right to freely access information, “that is, free from interference from government, religious or political views.”

A well-known quote by Jo Godwin sums it up nicely: “A truly great library contains something in it to offend everyone.”

Protecting freedom of information parallels what newspapers strive to do daily. A free press remains vitally important, perhaps even more so these days in such a divided society.

We support ImagineIF Libraries’ process of tasking trained library professionals to choose a diverse selection of materials intended to serve the entire community. As Furman noted, professional librarians are trained to identify and overcome their own personal biases in order to select materials fairly.

“I understand that content contained in many books in our collection can upset and disturb patrons,” Furman said in her letter to the community. “Encountering a book that violates one’s own worldview can cause feelings of stress, sadness, surprise and anger. Yet the library needs to provide free access to our current materials so you can make up your own minds.”

Do we want to be a society that bans books? Of course not. Protecting free speech, whether oral or written, is a fundamental freedom all Americans enjoy.

If you choose to counteract these local complaints that have spun off from a national conversation, go to the library and fill out your own Citizen Comment on Library Material in favor of the decisions that were made to include these two books in the local collection. It’s important all viewpoints are heard.