

# The Right to Read and Know - An American Freedom

With the climate of public opinion shifting as rapidly as it does in a democratic society, library directors and trustees need to be prepared to insure and protect the right of all citizens to free access to information of all kinds. There are times when people, being fearful of the diversity and changes taking place in our culture, want to restrict this access. Now, although knowledge and information are neutral, these pressure groups often want to force libraries to supply just those ideas and materials of which they approve. People who suggest this are not only afraid, but they have lost sight of the uniquely American tradition of allowing and protecting the freedom of expression for all people, regardless of their ideas.

**The Library Bill of Rights** is the keystone to preserve a library heritage which dates back to our county's founding. The library is best served if it develops a clear set of guidelines to help its community understand and support its freedom to read and to know. The following is a checklist of procedures that can help the library serve the whole community.

✓ **Be sure the library has:**

- Adopted the *Library Bill of Rights* (with all of its Interpretive Statements), the *Freedom to Read*, and the *Freedom to View* statements.
- A strong materials selection policy.
- A procedure for handling complaints.
- Trained the staff to understand the policies and complaint procedures.
- Clear policies relating to the registration of customers.
- Clear policies relating to library programming and other provided services.

The library staff needs to know they have the trustees' and administration's support if they follow the library's procedures.

✓ **The library director must:**

- Select materials wanted and needed by the community based on the guidelines in the library's materials selection policy.
- Not avoid purchasing materials because they may be controversial, or because they represent a different point of view.
- Treat each person, including minors, requesting help as a customer: remember - kids are people too, and customers!
- Support parents in their role, although not acting *in loco parentis*.

✓ **The librarian and the trustees must:**

- Educate staff, city or county committee members, and community groups about the importance of intellectual freedom in a free society.
- Find supporters in the community for the library's role as a place to provide information in a free society.
- Cultivate contacts with the press and local media.
- Prepare supporters to be ready to help the library if it becomes necessary.

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