

STATEMENT ON LABELING

An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights

Labeling is the practice of describing or designating library materials by affixing a prejudicial label and/or segregating them by a prejudicial system. The St. Charles Public Library District opposes this as a means of predisposing people's attitudes towards library materials for the following reasons:

1. Labeling is an attempt to prejudice attitudes and, as such, it is censor's tool.
2. Some find it easy and even proper, according to their ethics, to establish criteria for judging publications as objectionable. However, injustice and ignorance rather than justice and enlightenment result from such practices, and the St. Charles Public Library District opposes the establishment of such criteria.
3. Libraries do not advocate the ideas found in their collections. The presence of books and other resources in a library does not indicate endorsement of their contents by the library.

A variety of private organizations promulgate rating systems and/or review materials as a means of advising either their members or the general public concerning their opinions of the contents and suitability or appropriate age for use of certain books, films, recordings, or other materials. For the library to adopt or enforce any of these private systems, to attach such ratings to library materials, to include them in bibliographic records, library catalogs, or other finding aids, or otherwise to endorse them would violate the Library Bill of Rights.

While some attempts have been made to adopt these systems into law, the constitutionality of such measures is extremely questionable. If such legislation is passed which applies within a library's jurisdiction, the library should seek competent legal advice concerning its applicability to library operations.

Publishers, industry groups, and distributors sometimes add ratings to material or include them as part of their packaging. Librarians should not endorse such practices. However, removing or obliterating such ratings – if placed there by or with permission of the copyright holder – could constitute expurgation, which is also unacceptable.

The Board of Trustees of the St. Charles Public Library District opposes efforts which aim at closing any path to knowledge. This statement does not, however, exclude the adoption of organizational schemes designed as directional aids or to facilitate access to materials.

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