

# ACCESS TO LIBRARY RESOURCES AND SERVICES REGARDLESS OF SEX, GENDER IDENTITY, GENDER EXPRESSION, OR SEXUAL ORIENTATION

## An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*

---

American libraries exist and function within the context of a body of laws derived from the United States Constitution and the First Amendment. The *Library Bill of Rights* embodies the basic policies that guide libraries in the provision of services, materials, and programs.

In the preamble to its *Library Bill of Rights*, the American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas. This concept of forum and its accompanying principle of inclusiveness pervades the *Library Bill of Rights*.

The American Library Association stringently and unequivocally maintains that libraries and librarians have an obligation to resist efforts that systematically exclude materials dealing with any subject matter, including sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation:

- Article I of the *Library Bill of Rights* states that "Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation." The Association affirms that books and other materials coming from presses that specialize in gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender subject matter; gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender authors or other creators; and materials regardless of format or services dealing with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender life are protected by the *Library Bill of Rights*. Librarians are obligated by the *Library Bill of Rights* to endeavor to select materials without regard to the sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation of their creators by using the criteria identified in their written, approved selection policies.<sup>1</sup>
- Article II maintains that "Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval." Library services, materials, and programs representing diverse points of view on sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation should be considered for purchase and inclusion in library collections and programs.<sup>2</sup> The Association affirms that attempts to proscribe or remove materials dealing with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender life without regard to the written, approved selection policy violate this tenet and constitute censorship.

- Articles III and IV mandate that libraries "challenge censorship" and cooperate with those "resisting abridgement of free expression and free access to ideas."
- Article V holds that "A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background or views." In the *Library Bill of Rights* and all its Interpretations, it is intended that: "origin" encompasses all the characteristics of individuals that are inherent in the circumstances of their birth; "age" encompasses all the characteristics of individuals that are inherent in their levels of development and maturity; "background" encompasses all the characteristics of individuals that are a result of their life experiences; and "views" encompasses all the opinions and beliefs held and expressed by individuals. Therefore, Article V of the *Library Bill of Rights* mandates that library services, materials, and programs be available to all members of the community the library serves, without regard to sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation. This includes providing youth with comprehensive sex education literature.<sup>3</sup>
- Article VI maintains that "Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use." This protection extends to all groups and members of the community the library serves, without regard to sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation.

The American Library Association holds that any attempt, be it legal or extra-legal, to regulate or suppress library services, materials, or programs must be resisted in order that protected expression is not abridged. Librarians have a professional obligation to ensure that all library users have free and equal access to the entire range of library services, materials, and programs. Therefore, the Association strongly opposes any effort to limit access to information and ideas. The Association also encourages librarians to proactively support the First Amendment rights of all library users, regardless of sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Evaluating Library Collections: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*," adopted February 2, 1973, by the ALA Council; amended July 1, 1981; June 2, 2008; and June 25, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> "Challenged Resources: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*," Adopted June 25, 1971, by the ALA Council; amended July 1, 1981; January 10, 1990; January 28, 2009; July 1, 2014; and January 29, 2019. "User-Initiated Exhibits, Displays, and Bulletin Boards: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*," adopted July 2, 1991, by the ALA Council; amended June 30, 2004, July 1, 2014, and June 25, 2019; "Library-Initiated Programs and Displays as a Resource: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*," adopted January 27, 1982, by the ALA Council; amended June 26, 1990; July 12, 2000; June 26, 2018 under previous name "Library-Initiated Programs as a Resource"; and June 24, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> *ALA Policy Manual*, "Sex Education Materials in Libraries," B.8.6.2 (Old Number 52.5.2)

Adopted June 30, 1993, by the ALA Council; amended July 12, 2000; June 30, 2004; July 2, 2008; and January 28, 2020.