



***THE COURAGE TO
PUT ON THE CAPE!***

***HOW LIBRARY TRUSTEES CAN HARNESS
THEIR POWER FOR GOOD***

by Kelly Jensen

NHLTA
Keynote
May 2025

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HELLO!

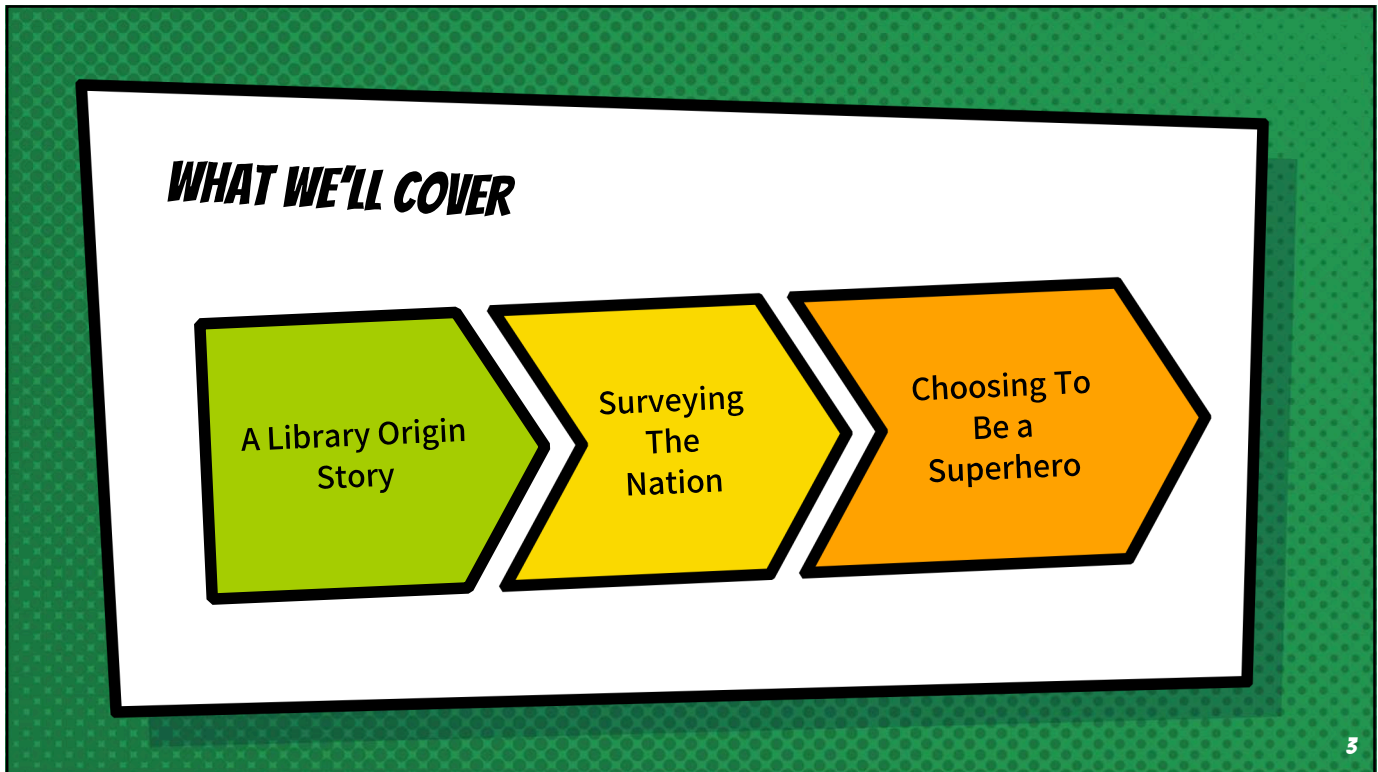
MY NAME IS KELLY JENSEN

- × Editor at Book Riot
- × Author/Editor of 3 YA anthologies
- × Former Illinois + Wisconsin public librarian



- 2024 Library Journal Mover & Shaker
- Chicagoan of the Year & Publishers Weekly Person of the Year in 2022

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***WHAT CALLS YOU TO
SERVE ON YOUR
PUBLIC LIBRARY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES?***

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WHAT CALLS YOU TO SERVE?



***SEEKING PUBLIC
OFFICE OR SERVICE***

***INTEREST IN THE PUBLIC
LIBRARY***

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THE FIRST **PUBLIC LIBRARY**

Peterborough Public Library was the first publicly funded & tax supported library in the world, 1833.

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THE FIRST & OLDEST STATE LIBRARY, TOO: 1717

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WHAT IS A PUBLIC LIBRARY?

Books

Movies

Audiobooks

Technology

Internet

Storytime

Book Clubs

Reference Services

Programming

Access

Leisure Space

Study Rooms

Job Resources

Educational Tools

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THE PUBLIC LIBRARY IS...

A third space

A place for curiosity & inquiry

An institution meeting the educational and
entertainment needs of a community

A center for civic engagement & democracy

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WHAT LIBRARIES ARE UP AGAINST IN 2025

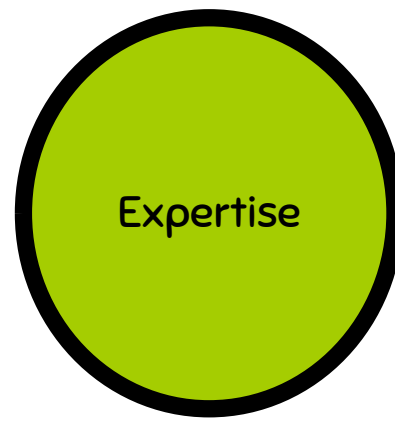
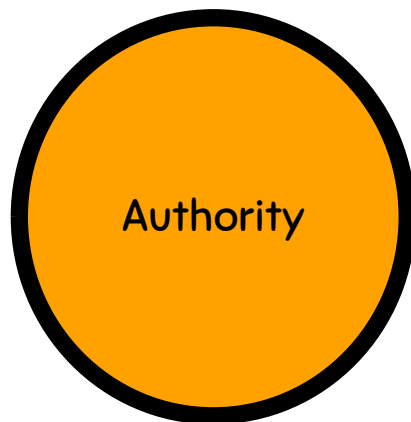
- Loss of federal, state, & local funding
- Book censorship, both loud & quiet
- An ever-growing digital divide
- Staff stress, secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout
- Higher prices & poorer terms for digital resources
- Rampant mis- and dis- information
- Conspiracy theories & propaganda related to the library's mission and purpose
- Artificial intelligence
- Becoming social support structures when funding to actual support services disappears

AUTHORITY PARADING AS EXPERTISE

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KEEP THESE TWO CONCEPTS IN MIND

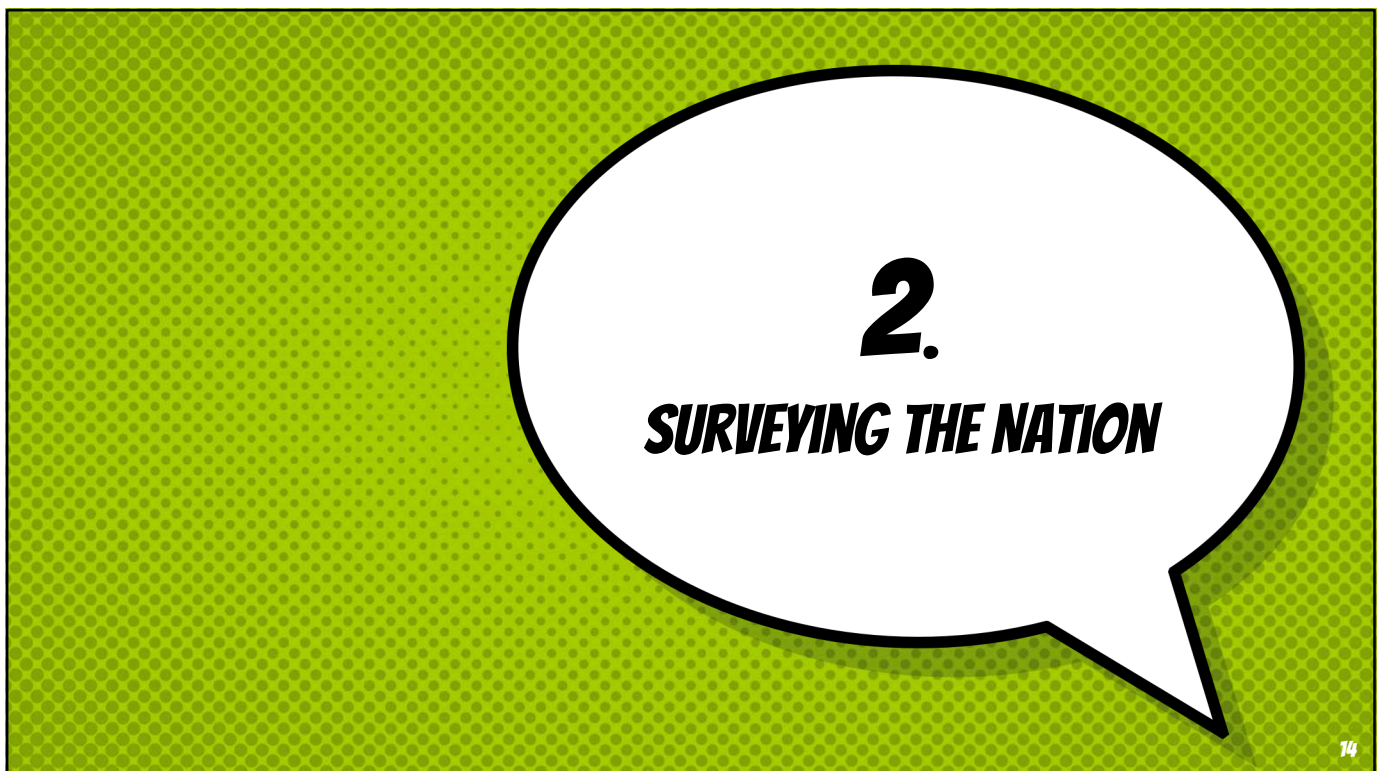


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COMMUNITY LIBRARY NETWORK

A story of interpreting a state law to pursue an agenda



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KOOTENAI COUNTY, IDAHO

- × **Community Library Network: 7 library system on the Western border of Idaho**
- × **Does not include Coeur D'Alene, a different library system in the same county**

IDAHO HOUSE BILL 710:

Parents/guardians can lodge complaints about materials they deem "inappropriate for minors."

Once a complaint has been filed, libraries have 60 days to relocate the material to a section that is only accessible to adults.

If they do not comply, those parents or guardians can receive \$250 in statutory damages from the library in question, alongside other financial relief for damages.

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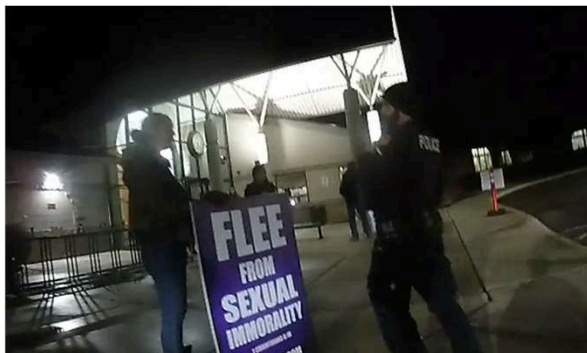
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2021-2023: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

- × Two far-right trustees on board, with regular public comments about inappropriate books on shelves.
- × Two trustee candidates interviewed by local Republicans, asked targeted questions about LGBTQ+ books
- × Local sheriff makes news stating community members tipped him off to 100s of books against Idaho law
- × Grown adults protesting a long-running Rainbow Club for teens; one arrested for trespassing & had weapons on him.

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"ALL'S WE'RE ASKING FOR DOESN'T CALL FOR BANNING OF BOOKS, AND IT DOESN'T CALL FOR A RESTRICTION ON WHAT YOU CAN BUY," [SHERIFF] NORRIS SAID. "ONLY IF IT HAS SEXUAL EXPLICIT CONTENT. IT'D BE IN AN AREA FOR 18 AND OVER."

Programming policy draft discussion

Rodda presented the programming policy. She researched several policies from around the nation. This is a new policy for the District. Robinson would like to add under the "Library will not provide": #4 Programs that support or oppose a specific sexual orientation. Programs may not promote or champion a particular sexual orientation. Ottosen would like to also add: #5 Programs that are reasonably considered controversial, sexual, immoral or illicit for minors. Blank would like to see the research and sources regarding statistics voiced by Ottosen and Robinson. McCrea is unaware of library programs that are perceived to be detrimental to minors. She believes libraries are free for all to seek information and ideas from all points of view. Meyer believes that libraries provide access to accurate information to the public and that parents are responsible for what their minor children access. Meyer asked about clarifying "research-based" programs - should it include some phrasing regarding "accurate or factual"? Discussion will continue at the next regular meeting.

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ABOUT CleanBooks4Kids

We are fathers, mothers, grandfathers, grandmothers, uncles, aunts, homeschoolers and concerned citizens who cherish libraries so we united to make our libraries safe again for kids!

What we believe:

We are one nation under God.

Our Constitution is sacred and must be respected and upheld.

The 1st amendment must be upheld and protected.

The 1st amendment must not be used as a cover to expose children to sexually explicit materials.

We must protect children from early sexualization.

Children have a right to be protected from material that is harmful to them.

Parents have the right for their children be protected from harmful material at local public libraries.

Parents have the right to introduce their children to adult topics when they feel it is appropriate; libraries must work with parents to protect that right.

Libraries should be healthy places of learning, not places of indoctrination.

Indoctrination of children is immoral. If we allow our public institutions to continue to allow these harmful materials, children and our society at large will be very seriously impacted in extremely detrimental ways.

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CleanBooks4Kids has made significant local and statewide inroads in addressing sexually explicit materials for minors. From our community education and activation:

- The Community Library Network's (CLN) Board of Trustees revised the minor card offerings.
- Kootenai County voters elected a conservative majority to the CLN board
- The CLN board has made policy revisions curtailing the purchase of sexually explicit materials for minors
- Numerous sexually explicit books for minors have already been reclassified to "Adult" or weeded from CLN's collection
- Three Library directors and a board trustee who were disinclined toward these revisions have resigned
- Idaho's legislature passed 1815-17B "The Children's School and Library Protection Act" to address sexually explicit materials for minors.

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ENTER 2024

- × “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” stripped from website
- × Board considers locking away material in a cabinet or room if deemed “inappropriate” for minors.
- × Inability to budget leads to 13 layoffs

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"Equity, it means a lot of different things to a lot of people," Trustee Tim Plass said.

"The library should not be getting itself in cultural movements," Plass said. "Let's be a little neutral. If we want to celebrate differences and unique learning styles, we can say that, but let's not get involved in diversity, equity and inclusion because it's too confusing and it is a cultural hot button right now. Let's not try to be a leader in that, just strike those words."

Chair Rachelle Ottosen said although some people will disagree, and diversity, equity and inclusion sound good at face value, "the academia who invented and pushed DEI, pushed the DEI concept, clearly state it is intended to divide the people against each other and usher in Marxism."

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ENTER HB 710

- × 140 books being moved into a private room at one branch library; inaccessible to anyone under 18 without a parent.
- × 17 additional books challenged for this “mature” section, including the Bible.
- × Ban on library acquiring future books on “abortion, police discrimination, drugs, gender identity, occult, racism, rape, suicide, violence, nontraditional families or lifestyle.”
- × Age-restricted library cards (implemented in 2023) ban access to other consortia libraries.

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"WE DON'T WANT MINORS TO BE ABLE TO GET MATERIAL FROM NON-CLN LIBRARIES BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAVE THE IDAHO LAW," BOARD MEMBER TIM PLASS SAID. "THAT ACCESS NEVER SHOULD HAVE BEEN GIVEN, IN MY OPINION. BUT UNDER 18, WE HAVE GOT TO END THOSE CARDS."

"I'M GOING TO PROTECT MINORS, AND THEREFORE I'M NOT GOING TO LET MINORS HAVE ACCESS TO ANYWHERE, INCLUDING WASHINGTON STATE, INCLUDING OTHER LIBRARIES IN IDAHO THAT MAY NOT BE AS CONSERVATIVE AS WE ARE," BOARD MEMBER TOM HANLEY SAID.

"I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT WE ARE ALL RIGHT WITH HAVING PARENTS TAKING," [BOARD MEMBER] AMBROSETTI SAID BEFORE STOPPING MIDSSENTENCE, "... UNDER WHAT? UNDER THE GUISE THAT THEY KNOW WHAT'S BEST FOR THEIR CHILDREN? FORGET THAT IF YOU WERE AT PRIDE IN THE PARK 21½ YEARS AGO."

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MILLBURN SCHOOL DISTRICT

A story of undermining the law to push political conspiracy theory

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LAKE COUNTY, ILLINOIS

- × Far north suburban Chicagoland
- × Two schools serving about 1,100 students in K-8

BANNING BOOK BANS

In 2023, Illinois became the first state to ban book bans.

The law, applicable to both public and school libraries, ties a pool of state funding to having the Library Bill of Rights and Freedom to Read statements in collection policies.

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THE REBECCA CAUDILL AWARDS

- × Annual state awards list voted on by Illinois students in grades 4-8.
- × Honor earned for literary merit and appeal to tween readers.
- × Libraries make 12 of 20 titles on a master list available; students need to read only 3 to vote.
- × Encourages reading for pleasure among this age category
- × An opportunity for public school and library collaboration.

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MARCH 2024

- × Librarians at elementary and middle school, alongside a district parent on the Caudill steering committee (also a librarian!) presented to Committee of the Whole about state award programs.
- × Presentation highlighted the value of student-selected awards and the connection to windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors*
- × Board member asks if the presenters thought the list was “left leaning.” It was essential to be “neutral.”

*A concept first described by Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop

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THE CAUDILL @ MILLBURN

**STUDENT
PARTICIPATION IN THE
CAUDILL AWARDS AT
MILLBURN WAS
VOLUNTARY.**

2025 Rebecca Caudill List



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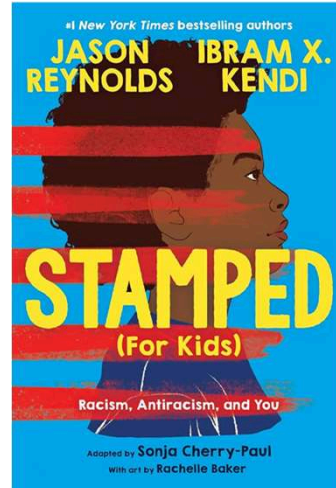
"IF YOU WERE TO ADMIT THAT IT'S LEFT CULTURALLY LEANING BOTH POLITICALLY AND CULTURALLY [...] THE LIST DIDN'T START OUT THAT WAY BUT OVER THE YEARS IT HAS UM AND I DON'T THINK WE SHOULD HAVE A LIST THAT WE CELEBRATE AND PROMOTE THAT LEANS ONE WAY OR THE OTHER. I THINK TO CELEBRATE SOMETHING THAT LEANS ONE WAY OR THE OTHER ISN'T RIGHT AND THAT'S THAT'S MY OPINION."

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MARCH 2024 CONTINUED

- × Several minutes of argument among committee members about whether or not the list is “left leaning.”
- × Initial complainant admits to not reading the books his son brought home . . . except one.



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MARCH 2024 CONTINUES

- × Full school board meets one week later and the Caudill Awards are on the agenda
- × Two hours of public comments from over 60 community members: do not end the program.
- × Four board members vote to end program.

REASONS CITED:

- × There's no proof the list isn't political
- × PragerU has a good enough list of recommended books for this age
- × The vast majority of people in the room wanted the books on the list banned anyway.

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"BECAUSE WHO PICKS THE BOOKS MATTERS, THERE ARE CERTAIN AREAS OF THE STATE WHERE ONE IDEOLOGY IS MUCH MORE DOMINANT THAN ANY OTHER IDEOLOGY," BOARD MEMBER JOHN LORENTZEN SAID. "SO IF YOU HAVE 80 EVALUATORS AND 60 ARE FROM THIS PART OF THE STATE WHERE THEY HAVE THIS PHILOSOPHY AND YOU HAVE 20 FROM THE REST OF THE STATE THAT HAVE A DIFFERENT PHILOSOPHY. OBVIOUSLY, MAJORITY IS GOING TO RULE AND YOU'RE GOING TO SEE A TILT IN THAT DIRECTION AND THAT'S REALLY THE CONCERN THE BOARD HAS."

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APRIL 2024 ARRIVES

- × The board meeting is packed with speakers again
- × Two members propose compromise: parental permission slips to participate in the Caudill-proposal rejected.
- × A second proposal made immediately after: reinstate the program fully—it passes

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"JUST BECAUSE A FEW PEOPLE DON'T WANT THEIR KIDS TO LEARN ABOUT THAT, OR WANT TO BLOCK THAT, DOESN'T MEAN THEY HAVE THE RIGHT TO DISMANTLE CURRICULUM THEY DON'T AGREE WITH."

""I THINK IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT FOR THE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE TO KEEP AN EYE ON WHAT'S GOING ON WITH THIS BOARD AND TO HOLD THEM ACCOUNTABLE."

-- DISTRICT PARENT AND EDUCATOR

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SAMUELS PUBLIC LIBRARY

A story of a library board's power being usurped.



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FRONT ROYAL, VIRGINIA

- × Serves all of Warren County's 41,000+ residents
- × DMV Metro area
- × A public/private partnership: County provides 70% of budget, Samuels Library, Inc. (private nonprofit org) serves as board.
- × Trustees on board are appointed by current trustees; one County Supervisor serves as well

A NOTE ABOUT VIRGINIA'S LEGISLATION ON CENSORSHIP

In 2024, an anti-book ban bill went through the Virginia General Assembly and was passed both in the House and Senate.

It was vetoed at Governor Glenn Youngkin's desk. Youngkin campaigned on book banning during his last election.

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MAY 2023

- × 53 members of St. John The Baptist Church launch "Clean Up Samuels." The goal? Remove books they deem inappropriate from the library*
- × The group submits over 800 reconsideration forms and begins to threaten library funding
- × The library and board are reviewing titles as quickly as possible—there are hundreds and none are meeting the removal threshold.
- × Group approaches Warren County Board of Supervisors, who elected to withhold 75% of library's budget.

*This is .13% of the total population of Warren County

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SUMMER & FALL 2023

- × In August, the library director quits, tired of the harassment about books
- × The library board has been given no explanation for how to get their allocated funds from the County.
- × Closure imminent October 1, 2023.

COMPROMISE REACHED:

- × Library develops 2 levels of library card access
- × Creates “new adult” section with books best for those 16+ and some challenged titles relocated here.

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MORE ABOUT THAT COMPROMISE

***COUNTY SUPERVISORS
RELEASE FUNDS TO
LIBRARY FOLLOWING
NEW LIBRARY POLICIES.***

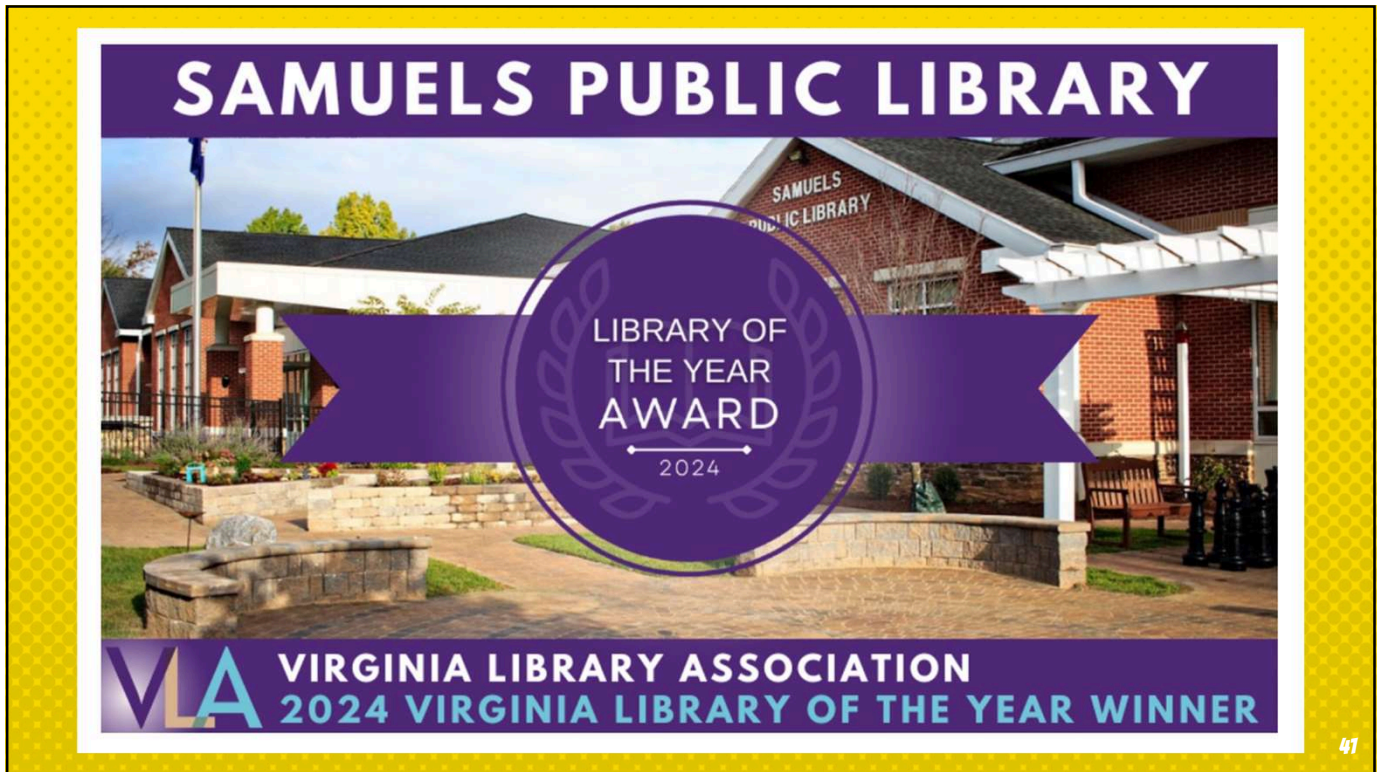
Good through 2025.

***THEY ALSO TRIED TO
NEGOTIATE HOW MANY
TRUSTEES THEY GET TO
APPOINT TO THE
LIBRARY BOARD.***

This did not fly.

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Mellon Foundation

Explore Ideas
Inside Mellon

Search

Grant Resources

Support for Public Library Memory Labs

to support the activities of the memory lab

| | |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Grantee | Samuels Library, Inc. |
| Location | Front Royal, Virginia, United States |
| Amount | \$500,000 |
| Date of award | March 8, 2024 |
| Length | 60 months |
| Grantmaking area | Public Knowledge |
| Guiding strategy | Preservation |

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2024 & 2025: THE BATTLE RETURNS

- × Unhappy with the library's refusal to move LGBTQ+ books, County Supervisors vote to give themselves more control over Samuels Public Library.
- × Decision a result of one Commissioner's report detailing necessity of a new board appointed by taxpayer representation.
- × More "necessary to ensure fiscal responsibility and operational efficiency."
- × Another attempt to defund the library if not approved by June.

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THE COUNTY TAKES OVER THE LIBRARY

- × County Commissioners develop their own library oversight board, Warren County Library Board.
- × Removes control of library from trustees and into the hands of county politicians.
- × County Supervisors vote to not renew funding agreement with library. Budget would expire in June.

WHAT'S THE WAY FORWARD? WHOSE INTERESTS ARE BEING SERVED?

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**"THINGS WERE LOOKING GOOD FOR THE LIBRARY'S FUTURE,"
[SAID RESIDENT CHIP] STEWART. "BUT NOW, THE TROUBLE IS
RETURNING."**

**"IT'S THE LIBRARY OF THE YEAR. YOU GUYS TRIED TO BAN SOME
GAY BOOKS, GOT BEAT, NOW THIS. EVERYBODY KNOWS THE
TRUTH. LET IT BE." - COMMUNITY MEMBER AND LIBRARY
ADVOCATE**

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A FEW MORE QUICK STOPS

RUTHERFORD COUNTY LIBRARY (TN) & GREENVILLE COUNTY LIBRARY (SC)

Bans on any books by or about trans and nonbinary people for anyone under 18.

ALPENA PUBLIC LIBRARY (MI)

Inclusion of LGBTQ+ books in library has led to a 2-year battle with 2 small groups, county commission.

SUMNER COUNTY (TN)

No one under 18 may enter adult book stacks in library

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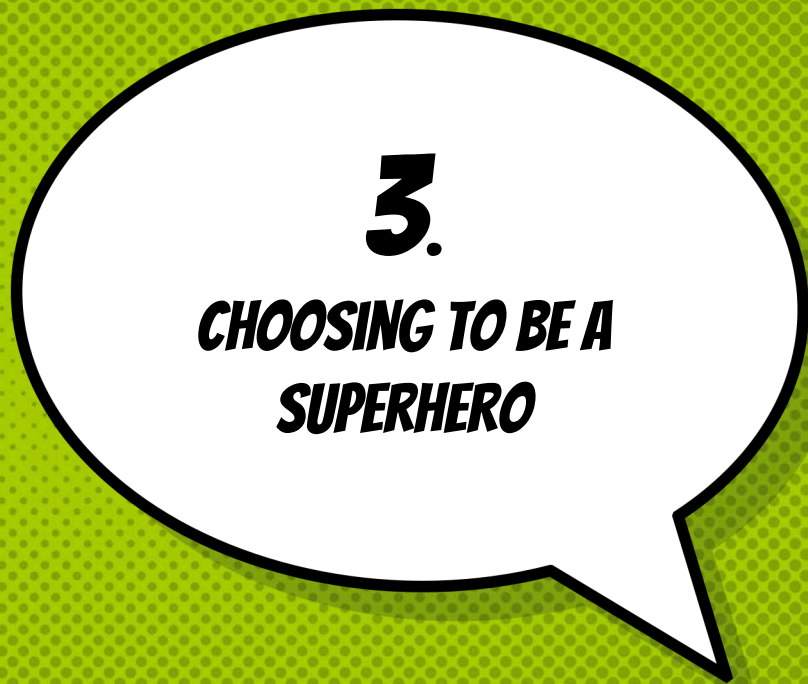
A FEW MORE QUICK STOPS

EAST HAMILTON PUBLIC LIBRARY (IN)

At behest of the library board, all books in teen section needed to be “age appropriate.”

1000s of hours and dollars to review titles . . . only to discontinue when the board makeup changed.

| | |
|---|--|
| Appendix A – Grossly Offensive Terms | |
| Slut | Formatted: Font Bold |
| Fuck | Formatted: Bold |
| Blotch | Formatted: Bold |
| Cock | Formatted: Bold |
| Dick | Formatted: Bold |
| Piss | Formatted: Bold |
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| Shit | Formatted: Bold |
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| Appendix B – Crimes Involving Violence | |
| — Murder | Formatted: List Paragraph, Line spacing: Double, Sublist level: 1 – Original id: 237 – Violent et. |
| — Homicide | Formatted: List Paragraph, Line spacing: Double, Sublist level: 1 – Original id: 237 – Violent et. |
| — Rape | Formatted: List Paragraph, Line spacing: Double, Sublist level: 1 – Original id: 237 – Violent et. |
| — Sexual Assault | Formatted: List Paragraph, Line spacing: Double, Sublist level: 1 – Original id: 237 – Violent et. |
| — Battery | Formatted: List Paragraph, Line spacing: Double, Sublist level: 1 – Original id: 237 – Violent et. |
| — Kidnapping | Formatted: List Paragraph, Line spacing: Double, Sublist level: 1 – Original id: 237 – Violent et. |
| — Robbery | Formatted: List Paragraph, Line spacing: Double, Sublist level: 1 – Original id: 237 – Violent et. |
| — Arson | Formatted: List Paragraph, Line spacing: Double, Sublist level: 1 – Original id: 237 – Violent et. |
| — Child abuse | Formatted: List Paragraph, Line spacing: Double, Sublist level: 1 – Original id: 237 – Violent et. |
| — Human Trafficking | Formatted: List Paragraph, Line spacing: Double, Sublist level: 1 – Original id: 237 – Violent et. |
| — Prostitution | Formatted: List Paragraph, Line spacing: Double, Sublist level: 1 – Original id: 237 – Violent et. |
| — Terrorism | Formatted: List Paragraph, Line spacing: Double, Sublist level: 1 – Original id: 237 – Violent et. |



COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS (& HOW TO DEFEAT THEM)

- × Trustees—or the library—can't be political.
- × Things are fine at our library, so why worry?
- × It's our job to decide the day-to-day at the library.

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TRUSTEES & THE LIBRARY CAN'T BE POLITICAL

- × Those eager to make libraries subject to one view of the world don't hide their politics.
- × Your funding is political
- × Your community makeup is political

YOU ARE POLITICALLY PRO-LIBRARY, A NONPARTISAN POSITION.

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THINGS AT OUR LIBRARY ARE FINE!

BE PROACTIVE

- × Be prepared for possible attacks before they happen
- × Protect your staff and property

KEEP TABS ON THE NEWS

- × It might not be in your yard now, but it will be
- × Know what other places are seeing so you can prepare policy and procedure.

ASK: ARE THEY *REALLY*?

- × Take a temperature of your staff and ask for pain points
- × Empower your best assets to advocate

BE A MODEL, NOT AN EXAMPLE.

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IT'S OUR JOB TO OVERSEE THE EVERY DAY

- × Your job is to hire and encourage development of a competent director
- × Your job is to listen to your whole community—not just the loudest or most powerful
- × Trust your library's staff to do their jobs. They're experts—empower them to be just that.
- × Be unabashedly pro-library and pro-YOUR library everywhere possible.

TRUSTEES MARRY AUTHORITY WITH EXPERTISE.

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PEOPLE LOVE THE LIBRARY-LET THEM.

96% of parents think libraries are safe spaces for their children.

92% of parents report trusting librarians to select and recommend appropriate material.

90% of parents are comfortable letting their children select their own library materials.

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PEOPLE LOVE THE LIBRARY-LET THEM.

83% of parents agree that librarians know the kinds of books kids will like

85% of parents agree that librarians support lifelong learning

Parents state having many types of books and knowledgeable staff as most important library resources.

LIBRARIANS RANK IN THE TOP 5 MOST TRUSTED PROFESSIONS.

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METROPOLIS, ILLINOIS



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A LITTLE BACKSTORY

- × In 2021, director hired and the library board heard tons of praise about her programming work
- × But in 2023 and early 2024, things were not great—complaints from community members about director infusing her religious beliefs into programming.
- × Trustees wanted answers from director about the removal of 15,000 books. Director said it was to make room for programming.
- × The children's collection had 8 versions of the Bible and 1 Halloween book.

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A LITTLE BACKSTORY

- × January 2024: Local pastor and city council member tells followers to show up to the board meeting to stop Satanic influences.
- × The board would be discussing policies related to Illinois's anti-book ban bill
- × Director didn't want to pass the policy, which was *already* in place but was adding a privacy clause.
- × Library board votes 6-2 to pass policy.

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"THERE ARE GRANTS WE CAN GET," BAXTER SAID, "WHERE WE DON'T HAVE TO BARTER WITH SATAN IN ORDER TO GET THE FUNDING."

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THE BATTLE CONTINUES

- × Pastor continues to demonize the library and board members in sermons and local op-eds.
- × Director, Metropolis's Mayor, and the 2 library trustees who vetoed the policy are all members of that church.
- × Local lawyer warns library board that director's mixing of religion and government service was a lawsuit waiting to happen.
- × At next board meeting, Director given ultimatum.

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STANDING UP FOR WHAT'S RIGHT

TRUSTEES DELIVER TERMS:

- × Sign a performance improvement plan
- × Abide by the Library Bill of Rights
- × Actively seek state grant money
- × Stop praying aloud at the library with children

The director walks out & the board moves to fire her, voting 5-3.

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BUT IT WASN'T OVER

- × Three library staff members quit & trustees moved quick to find an interim director
- × The Mayor wrote a letter to the library board announcing three of them would be fired for terminating the director
- × Mayor's decision wasn't legal, as he needed to get City Council approval
- × As of the last trustee appointment in July 2024, the truth of what was going on in town helped the library garner even more support.

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"RETALIATING AGAINST LOCAL LIBRARY TRUSTEES, WHO ARE DEDICATED TO SERVING THEIR COMMUNITY AND ASSISTING CHILDREN IN LEARNING, IS UNACCEPTABLE," -- ILLINOIS STATE LIBRARIAN ALEXI GIANNOULIAS

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SUPERMAN APPROVES

***THE CHAIR OF THE
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
SPOKE UP AND STAYED
STRONG.***

***THE LIBRARY WAS THERE
TO SERVE EVERYONE IN
METROPOLIS AND NOT A
SINGLE CHURCH, NO
MATTER HOW POWERFUL.***

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SO WHAT CALLS YOU TO SERVE?



***MARRYING AN INTEREST
IN THE PUBLIC LIBRARY
WITH THE DUTY AND
RESPONSIBILITY THAT
COMES WITH SERVING
IN PUBLIC OFFICE***

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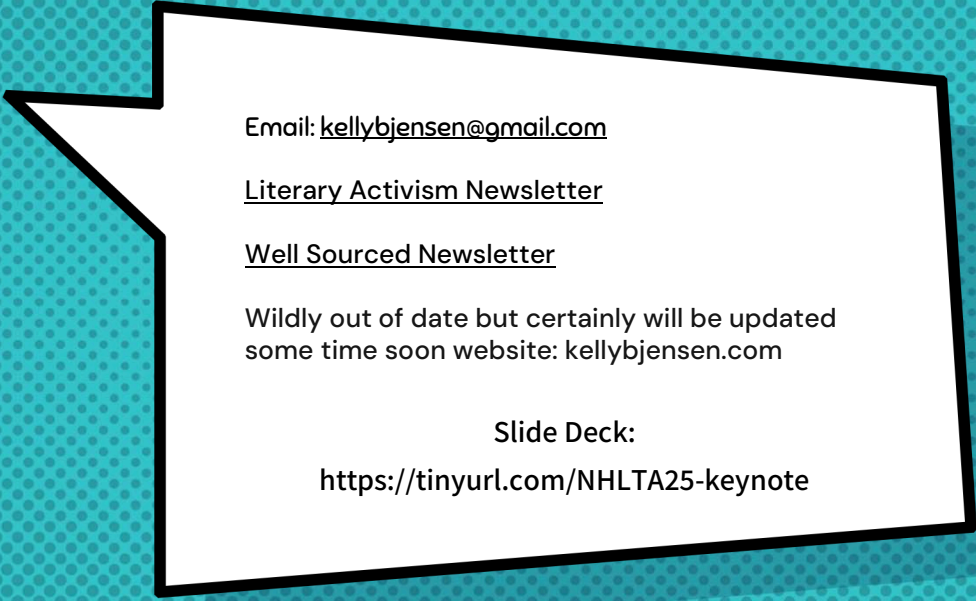
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Email: kellybjensen@gmail.com

Literary Activism Newsletter

Well Sourced Newsletter

Wildly out of date but certainly will be updated
some time soon website: kellybjensen.com

Slide Deck:

<https://tinyurl.com/NHLTA25-keynote>