

## St. Lucie County Library System

### Procedures for a Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials

Materials in the Library's collection are selected under the guidelines established in the Library's "Collection Management Policy" which states that the Library Director is responsible for the selection of library materials and, under her direction, this responsibility is delegated to staff who are qualified for this activity by reason of education, training, and experience.

The term "materials," as used in the policy, includes books, periodicals, pamphlets, pictures, photographs, audio recordings, films, video tapes, DVDs, software, databases, microforms, posters, displays, educational toys, and any other form or format in which information and ideas may be conveyed, either existing or as may be developed.

The Library recognizes that there will from time to time be citizen complaints or concerns about a specific title or type of material selected for or deselected (weeded) from the collection. When a complaint is made, the Library must ensure that the complaint is handled seriously and, equally important, that the fundamental principles of intellectual freedom are upheld. These procedures provide the systematic approach to be followed.

Steps in the Request for Reconsideration procedure, detailed below, must be followed (in the order elaborated) by citizens when challenging materials, and by the Library staff, Director, and Library Advisory Board when reconsidering challenged materials and rendering a decision about these materials. If citizens do not follow steps in the order elaborated, their complaint will not be considered further by Library staff, Director, or Library Advisory Board.

The procedure detailed below addresses challenges to materials where the goal is to remove the material from the Library's collection or to otherwise limit access to the material. Although not specifically addressed, the same procedures apply to challenges in which the goal is to add the material to the Library's collection or to limit the Library's ability to weed the collection. In other words, this policy and its procedures apply to any and all challenges to the Library's collection.

- 1. Initiation of Requests for Reconsideration.** Individuals or groups may initiate complaints about specific titles or types of materials in the Library's collection by talking to or writing to any member of the staff, the Director, or a member of the Library Advisory Board. At this point, such communications are considered informal complaints. The appropriate response to an informal complaint is for the staff, Director, or Board member to offer the complainant a Request for Reconsideration Form (available on the Library's website). In addition, the rationale for having a formal complaint procedure should be explained. No further action is to be taken by staff, the Director, or a member of the Library Advisory Board unless and until a Request for Reconsideration is made in writing on the appropriate form and the completed form is returned to the Library. All completed Request for Reconsideration forms are forwarded to the Technical Services Supervisor who serves as the Chair of the Request for Reconsideration Committee. Additionally, no further action can be taken unless and until the complainant returns the challenged material, if it is checked out to the complainant.
- 2. Acknowledgement of Receipt of Request for Reconsideration.** Once a complaint is received in writing on the Request for Reconsideration form, (appended to this procedure) it is acknowledged promptly by the Technical Services Supervisor or the Library Director. The complainant is written a letter which describes the Library's procedure and the time it will take to reconsider the material thoroughly. Copies of these procedures and the Library's "Collection Management Policy" are sent to the complainant as enclosures to the letter.

3. **Inquiries about Specific Requests for Reconsideration.** From time to time, complainants, other members of the public, the press, etc., may have questions concerning the status of a specific Request for Reconsideration. Questions should be addressed to the Library Director.
4. The Library Director or her designee appoints a committee of professional staff members to evaluate the challenged material. Usually, this committee is made up of three senior staff and is chaired by the Technical Services Supervisor. Members of the committee weigh several factors when reconsidering challenged materials: they read, listen to, or view the material in its entirety; they also look at the material in relationship to the Library's "Collection Management Policy" and to the rest of the collection; in addition they look at what literary critics and reviewers think of the material. After coming to individual conclusions, the committee meets to discuss the challenged material.

The committee recommends one of several actions to the Library Director: to retain the challenged material in the collection; to retain the challenged material but to move it to another location in the collection; to withdraw the challenged material.

The Library Director then evaluates the challenged material, weighing the factors listed above, and considers the committee's recommendation. If the Library Director does not concur with the committee, she refers the matter back to the committee. If the Library Director concurs with the committee, she writes a letter to the complainant which states her decision and the reasoning behind the decision. This letter also outlines the steps the complainant must take to bring the matter to the attention of the Library Advisory Board, if the complainant remains unsatisfied.

This step takes some time, usually a minimum of eight weeks. Until the Director's decision is rendered, other than the copies needed for the review process, the challenged material will remain on the shelf.

**Reconsideration by the Board.** If still not satisfied, the complainant may choose to bring the matter to the attention of the St. Lucie County Library Advisory Board. This action may be taken only after receiving a written decision from the Library Director. To initiate Board consideration, the complainant should write to the Library Director or President of the Board and request that the matter be placed on the agenda of the next regular meeting. The letter must be received at least ten (10) days prior to the next regular meeting of the Board. If received after that time, the matter will be deferred automatically until the succeeding regular meeting. The Library Director or Board President shall acknowledge receipt of the letter from the complainant in writing, and shall include in the acknowledgement the schedule of Board meetings at which the matter will be considered.

Once the Request for Reconsideration is on the agenda, the Board shall decide by a majority vote of the members present whether it wishes to consider further the Request for Reconsideration.

If the Board votes to consider the matter further, an ad hoc review panel of Board members is selected to evaluate the challenged material and the matter is placed on the agenda for the next regular meeting of the Board

If the Board does not vote to consider the request further, the matter is ended.

5. **Ad Hoc Review Panel.** The ad hoc review panel is selected by random drawing of three names from the Library Board roster. Members of this panel weigh several factors when reconsidering challenged materials: they read, listen to, or view the material in its entirety; they look at the material in relationship to the Library's "Collection Management Policy" and to the rest of the collection; in addition, they look at what literary critics and reviewers think of the

material. After coming to individual conclusions about the challenged material, each member of the panel completes a Board Evaluation of Challenged Material Form (appended to this procedure). Each recommends one of several actions to the Library Advisory Board: to retain the challenged material in the collection; to retain the challenged material but to move it to another location in the collection; to withdraw the challenged material. These recommendations are made with reference to the fundamental principles of intellectual freedom.

6. **Board's Decision on Challenged Material.** Having voted to consider the matter further in step number 6 (above) and having placed the matter on the agenda, final action on the disposition of the challenged material is taken at the next regular meeting of the Board (unless the challenged material is lengthy, in which case the matter may be postponed one regular meeting). The Board's final decision is announced publicly at this meeting. A vote in favor of at least five members of the Board (a majority vote of the full Board) shall be required to remove materials from the Library's collection, to move materials from one collection to another, or to otherwise restrict access to materials. Whatever the board's decision, the principles of the Library Bill of Rights should be reiterated and how the decision is in accordance with those principles should be explained. A very brief statement of the reason for the decision should also be made; e.g., "We have concluded that the material meets our selection criteria, and will be retained without restriction."
7. **Forms Appended:**

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