



FREDERICK
COUNTY
**PUBLIC
LIBRARIES**

Policy Manual

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Preface

The Library Board of Trustees for Frederick County Public Libraries (Board) regularly adopts, revises, and reaffirms library policy. These policies seek to reflect the Mission, Vision, and Values established by library staff and approved by the Board, and serve to assist staff in providing the best possible service to the citizens of Frederick County.

Mission

To meet people where they are.

To expand access and build bridges.

To foster individual and community growth.

To uplift voices and create spaces where all are welcome.

Vision

An informed, empowered, and vibrant community.

Core Values

We are kind. We listen and connect. We create.

Alcohol

At the discretion of the Library Director, Frederick County Public Libraries reserves the right to host events where food and beverage, including alcoholic beverages, may be served and consumed on the premises.

Adopted by the Board of Trustees of Frederick County Public Libraries on 4/3/13.

Revised 9/6/17. Reaffirmed 9/2/26.

Borrowing and Item Replacement

Most Library materials can be borrowed for 21 days and renewed up to 5 times unless the material is reserved; see chart below.

Most books and audiobooks	21 days
Express Books	7 days – no renewals
DVDs / Launchpads / Magazines / Hot Spots	7 days
Express DVDs	3 days – no renewals

Extension of due dates may be possible at the discretion of library staff. Book drops are open at all times. Digital content borrowing terms are set by each resource provider and are not covered by this policy.

Frederick County Public Libraries does not charge fines for overdue items. Items that are more than 10 days overdue will block the customer account from checking out more materials. If an item is overdue for more than 21 days, it is assumed lost, and the customer account will be charged a replacement cost for the item. Items that are damaged while checked out to a customer will also be assessed a replacement cost.

At the patron's request, and if found, the lowest price reflected on Amazon for a new copy of the item (matching ISBN) may be accepted as the replacement cost. The library will acquire all replacement copies. Once a lost or damaged item has been paid for, no refunds will be issued.

Adopted by the Board of Trustees of Frederick County Public Libraries on 9/6/17. Revised 9/7/22, 9/2/26.

Code of Conduct

Frederick County Public Libraries is committed to serving everyone equitably regardless of origin, age, background, or views. These guidelines ensure that everyone may access the library's resources, services, and opportunities. Visitors and staff alike have the right to a safe and respectful experience, free from discrimination, intimidation, threat of harm or invasion of privacy. The below applies to anyone sharing physical or virtual spaces offered by the library. Staff may make requests regarding behaviors not outlined in this document if actions are detracting from this vision.

BE SAFE

The role of FCPL is to ensure a safe and welcoming environment for all. Examples of requested behaviors include but are not limited to:

- Remain awake and alert
- Wear footwear as well as clothing that covers the upper and lower body
- Stay with all personal items as the library cannot be liable for any loss or damage of property
- Refrain from using, handling, or selling alcohol, tobacco, vapes, or other controlled substances
- Do not enter with personal items that are leaking or that have pests
- Follow all local, state, and federal laws

RESPECT THE SPACE

The role of FCPL is to maintain a clean and comfortable shared environment. Examples of requested behaviors include but are not limited to:

- Use bathrooms for intended purposes only
- Be mindful of others and refrain from monopolizing space or obstructing access
- Leave non-service animals at home and keep service dogs in your control
- Do not consume food or beverages that contributes to an unclean environment, attracts pests, disrupts others, or harms resources
- Maintain a reasonable volume including that of personal devices

RESPECT EACH OTHER

The role of FCPL is to create a respectful environment where the diverse needs and expectations of all can be met. Examples of requested behaviors include but are not limited to:

- Keep speech free of obscene, abusive, or hateful language
- Do not assault, wield anything as a weapon, or challenge to fight
- Do not verbally or physically harass, intimidate, or threaten other individuals
- Refrain from solicitation of money, signatures, sales, or actions
- Do not interfere with the rights of others to use the library as a limited public forum

SUPERVISE THOSE IN YOUR CARE

The role of FCPL is to support and empower parents, guardians, and caregivers who serve as responsible parties for the safety and behavior of individuals requiring care while visiting the library.

Children must not be left alone. In Maryland, a child under the age of 8 years may not be left unattended. If a parent or guardian needs to leave a child who is younger than 8 years old, they must ensure that a reliable person, who is at least 13 years old, will stay to supervise the child.

If unsupervised children and other patrons who require care are unable to provide necessary information or the guardian cannot be reached, the police will be notified.

ENFORCEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Please seek staff assistance if these guidelines are not being followed. Staff will respond in a timely, respectful, and direct manner that is consistent and fair. Our enforcement is designed to maintain a safe and welcoming environment for staff and customers while preserving access to library resources, services, and opportunities. Consideration will be given to age, ability, and other individual circumstances.

Failure to comply with the Library's Code of Conduct could result in being asked to leave, emergency services being contacted, and/or suspension from the library's spaces.

Adopted by the Board of Trustees of Frederick County Public Libraries on 10/2/24. Reaffirmed 9/2/26.

Employee Discipline

Frederick County Public Libraries (FCPL) employees are subject to the Disciplinary and Grievance procedures in the Frederick County Government (FCG) Personnel Rules, except as specifically provided herein or as provided in State law or regulations. Grievances shall follow Chapter IX, Section 2, Grievance Procedure Appeal (Steps 1-3 ONLY) of the FCG personnel rules, with the final decision being made by the FCPL Director. Appeals of disciplinary actions other than suspension or dismissal shall also follow Chapter IX, Section 2, Grievance Procedure Appeal (Steps 1-3 ONLY) with the final decision being made by the FCPL Director. Appeals of suspensions and dismissals will follow the process in Chapter IX, Section 1, Appeal of Disciplinary Action; Dismissals, with the final decision being made by the Library Board of Trustees as opposed to the County Executive. For Dismissal only, when the Board of Trustees' decision is not unanimous, the employee may appeal to the State Board of Education for a final decision.

Adopted by the Board of Trustees of Frederick County Public Libraries on 11/2/16. Revised 9/2/26.

Facilities Naming

I. Purpose

This policy establishes recommendations for the naming of spaces and fixtures within the areas on the grounds of the Frederick County Public Libraries facilities. This policy does not address naming Library buildings.

II. Scope

The Library Board of Trustees (Board) will consider naming facilities of the Frederick County Public Libraries pursuant to the criteria and procedures established by this Policy.

III. Criteria

In order to recognize the generosity of an individual and/or corporation, foundation and/or other donor, the Library may choose to name a collection, facility, portion of a facility, etc. The Board has the sole right to name or rename a space and retains the authority to reject naming proposals at the recommendation of the Director of the Frederick County Public Libraries (Director).

In general, the contribution required for naming each library space or fixture should reflect at least 60% of the construction cost based on current market values (as a guideline only), to be approved of by the Board.

To inquire about naming opportunities within the Frederick County Public Libraries, please contact the Director.

Adopted by the Board of Trustees of Frederick County Public Libraries on 6/13/13. Reaffirmed 9/2/26.

Internet

The Internet is an ungoverned and unregulated source of information. The library cannot control what others provide on the Internet. The library provides a choice to individual members of our community to access the Internet according to their personal values and beliefs.

Frederick County Public Libraries provides free access to the Internet and its resources for all library users. Library patrons are advised, as with all library materials, to exercise judgment and discrimination when evaluating the usefulness and reliability of material found on the Internet.

Access to obscene matter and child pornography is prohibited on all library computers. As with other library materials, restriction of minors' (children under 18) access to the Internet is the responsibility of parents/legal guardians. Parents/legal guardians are responsible for the information selected or accessed by their children. Staff will actively intervene when they observe inappropriate behavior or it is brought to their attention.

In compliance with Maryland State law, all public access Internet computers in FCPL branches are filtered with commercially purchased software to block objectionable material. Children's Internet access computers are filtered at a more stringent level than Internet computers for adult use. Please be aware that no filtering software is 100% effective.

Users are responsible for compliance with all copyright notices and restrictions attached to web content, all state and federal laws, and the Library Rules of Conduct.

Adopted by the Board of Trustees of Frederick County Public Libraries on 9/4/02 and revised on 6/6/12. Revised 9/6/17. Reaffirmed 9/2/26.

Library Cards

Library cards are free to anyone who lives or works in Maryland and to anyone with a valid card from any of the following libraries: District of Columbia; Cities of Alexandria and Falls Church; and Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties in Virginia. Proof of name and address required.

Out of State residents may obtain a card for a one-time fee of \$40.00.

To obtain a library card, registrants must produce photo identification and proof of their current address. Examples of acceptable proof of address include, but are not limited to, personal checks with name and address, bills that reflect name and address, or a signed lease agreement that shows name and address.

If no proof of address is available, a registrant may receive a card and check out 3 items. Upon their next visit or within 60 days, whichever comes first, the individual must present proof of address or the account will be removed from the system. Cards expire if not used in 2 years.

A person under the age of 12 is eligible for a children's library card and must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian to obtain one. The parent or legal guardian must provide proper proof of address.

Library cardholders are responsible for lost or damaged materials, and parents/guardians are responsible for all materials borrowed on a children's library card.

Revised policy approved by the Board of Trustees of Frederick County Public Libraries on 9/6/17. Revised 9/4/19, 9/6/23. Reaffirmed 9/2/26.

Library Collection Policy

Frederick County Public Libraries (FCPL) is responsible for maintaining a collection of materials that reflects the diversity of the community and responds to its changing needs and interests. Collection maintenance is an ongoing process and a core part of the Library's mission. As the community evolves, the collection evolves with it to serve all people, regardless of origin, age, background, or viewpoint. This policy outlines the principles that guide the development and maintenance of FCPL's collection, providing a flexible framework for decision-making.

Collection Overview

FCPL maintains a popular collection that represents diverse perspectives and covers a broad range of subjects in both physical and digital formats. Digital formats may include learning databases, ebooks, eaudiobooks, and other downloadable or streaming media.

The Library selects materials to serve people of all races, ethnicities, cultures, national origins, abilities, ages, genders, sexual orientations, and religious or spiritual beliefs. Community demand and usage are the primary factors shaping the collection. Branch collections are shaped in part by customer use through a floating collection system, where items move between locations based on demand. Materials are shelved according to the intended audience regardless of the topic. FCPL does not aim to provide comprehensive or research-level collections and does not duplicate the role of college or specialized institutions.

Materials Selection

Collection decisions are influenced by physical space, item availability, and budget. Within these limits, staff use professional expertise, industry standards, and established criteria [see [Materials Guidelines](#)] to select materials responsibly. Selections are based on principles instead of personal opinions and reflect professional judgment rather than censorship. Final responsibility for selection rests with the Library Director.

Inclusion of an item does not imply endorsement of the author, publisher, or content by the Library. Materials are not excluded based on the possibility that they may be accessed by minors.

Human authorship is the standard for selection. Works created with or by Artificial Intelligence (AI) must meet additional criteria [see [Materials Guidelines](#)]. Those that meet the selection exceptions or which are purchased inadvertently will be labeled accordingly in the catalog.

Digital resources are selected using this same framework. Vendor-provided content on certain platforms, however, may be curated outside the Library's direct control, and therefore not subject to this policy or associated guidelines.

Laws and Professional Standards

FCPL selects materials in alignment with its [Mission, Vision, and strategic priorities](#), as well as applicable laws and professional standards, including:

[Maryland Freedom to Read Act](#) (COMAR Regulation 14.38.02.01))

[American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights](#)

ALA's [Freedom to Read and Freedom to View](#) statements

The Library affirms its commitment to intellectual freedom and the First Amendment. Everyone has the right to choose their own materials, and we support families in choosing what material is best for them. No one may restrict others' access.

The Library Board of Trustees may not dismiss, suspend, discipline, demote, reassign, transfer, or otherwise retaliate against an employee for performing their job duties consistent with these standards or for acting in a manner consistent with the library's written policy implementing the state standards for libraries.

Customer Feedback and Local Authors

FCPL customers may [suggest purchases or request reconsideration of materials](#) through the Library's established processes. Materials put forth for reconsideration will remain available through the review process, and decisions will be reached within a month of submission.

Local authors may submit their work using the [Local Author Guidelines](#) and online application form. Outside this process, donated materials are not added to the circulating collection.

All submissions and requests must align with FCPL's materials selection criteria outlined in this policy and in the [\[Material Selection Guidelines\]](#).

Collection Maintenance

The collection is continuously reviewed to remain relevant and useful. The withdrawal of materials is a formal, guided process conducted by library professionals and is necessary to maintain collection vitality, size, and scope. Items may be removed if they are outdated, no longer popular, superseded by a newer edition, or damaged. When considering withdrawal, the Library distinguishes between materials considered controversial and those containing misinformation. Decisions to replace withdrawn materials are made on a case-by-case basis.

Outdated formats may be discontinued, and low-use digital resources may be removed. Withdrawn materials are sold or disposed of according to County guidelines, with proceeds benefiting FCPL.

Special Collections

FCPL may add nontraditional materials to the collection when appropriate, even if they fall outside standard criteria. Decisions to add to the collection are made in alignment with this policy and associated guidelines.

The Maryland Room preserves and provides access to local history and specialized materials, including books, photographs, digital content, and archival items. Topics include genealogy, local and oral history, military history, folklore, and African American studies. Due to their unique nature, these materials do not circulate and are managed under specialized guidelines.

Adopted by the Board of Trustees of Frederick County Public Libraries on 9/2/26.

Library Facilities Use Policy

FCPL strives to provide an environment that encourages all customers to use its facilities, services, and resources in a safe and respectful manner. When not reserved for Library use, Library facilities are available regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of groups or individuals requesting their use. Permission to use FCPL facilities does not constitute an endorsement of the beliefs, ideas, or policies expressed by groups or individuals using the space.

Areas

Facilities refers to all space occupied or used by FCPL including:

- Community Information Displays
- Display Cases
- Grounds
- Interior Public Space
- Lobbies
- Meeting Rooms
- Parking Lots
- Study Rooms

Availability of these facilities varies in shared-use buildings and in relation to our mobile service vehicles.

Responsibilities

Library

FCPL reserves the right to cancel usage of the facility due to construction, elections, or unforeseen conflicts. In the case of an emergency closure, the Library will notify the group's contact person listed on the meeting room reservation.

FCPL reserves the right to refuse use of the rooms to individuals or groups who do not adhere to this policy, FCPL's Code of Conduct, or other library policies.

The Branch Administrator, in coordination with FCPL Administration when required, shall have final authority regarding the use of Library spaces. The Branch Administrator will be the final arbiter of disagreements concerning the application of the policies and guidelines.

Customer

Use by outside groups or individuals must adhere to the Library's Code of Conduct and any other relevant policies and may not interfere with regular library operations.

The group or individual is liable for any damage caused by them to the Library facility or equipment, and they will be billed accordingly. Future use of Library space will be denied until payment is received.

Each group shall be financially responsible for any injury to persons and damage, theft or loss of property (either personal or library-owned) resulting while using Library facilities. The Library cannot assume responsibility for private property used on Library premises. Private property can be used at the owner's risk. Library facilities may not be used to store personal items.

Signage on or around any part of the facility can only be posted with permission from Library staff.

Special Uses

After-hours usage

Activities on Library property occurring outside of normal operating hours are limited to FCPL-sponsored events and activities, with approval from the Director.

Collection bins

FCPL is unable to provide space in public areas for collection bins.

Demonstrations and signature gathering

Because the Library is considered a limited public forum, federal and state laws allow individuals to use outdoor spaces on FCPL property to gather signatures, display hand-held signs, pass out fliers, and engage in other expressive activities protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, so long as the passage of Library customers to and from the facility is not impeded. Interactions related to petitions or demonstrations must be initiated by the customer, not the demonstrator.

If an expressive activity will take place on all or any portion of a public street, sidewalk, or neighboring park, and/or if it involves the assembly of more than 50 people, organizers may be required to obtain a special permit from the applicable City or County.

Election activities

Voter registration must be conducted in a non-partisan manner. No endorsements may be made of any political party or candidate. Interactions related to voter registration must be initiated by the customer, not the organizers.

Library branches serving as early voting locations will enter a Memorandum of Understanding with the Frederick County Board of Elections and uphold the agreements within. Electioneering and campaign signs will be allowed at these locations during times and areas designated by the MOU.

Fundraising and sales

Fundraising activities or the sale of goods and services on Library property are limited to FCPL- sponsored events and activities including those related to Library Friend's groups.

Tabling

Lobby use is restricted to non-partisan voter registration, Census education, blood drives, and FCPL- sponsored events and activities.

Adopted by the Board of Trustees of Frederick County Public Libraries on 9/3/25. Reaffirmed 9/2/26.

Meeting Rooms

FCPL makes meeting rooms available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use. Meeting rooms are defined as interior branch spaces designed for public group meetings, Library programming, and the presentation and exchange of information and opinions of all kinds. When not in use by the Library, meeting spaces may be reserved by customers on a first-come, first-served basis.

All meetings must be open to the public excluding meetings that pertain to Library/Government work-related activities. No event organizer is permitted to bar others from the room unless it is necessary to comply with fire code limits. By making a meeting space available, the Library does not endorse the views of any group using the space.

Meeting rooms may not be used for parties or personal events or for regular business operations. Sales and fundraising are allowed only in conjunction with a Library event.

Fees may not be charged to attendees by event organizers. The Library does not charge fees for use of its meeting rooms.

FCPL reserves the right to deny applications for use based on the availability of space, repeated no-shows, or failure to adhere to policies and guidelines.

Authorization to use FCPL's facilities does not reflect sponsorship by the Library. Responsibility for appropriate promotion lies with the event organizer. Meeting room reservations do not appear on FCPL's Calendar of Events. No implication can be made through written material or media relations that FCPL is sponsoring the event. The FCPL logo cannot be used without the library's permission, and promotion or advertisements shall include the phrase, "Not a Library-sponsored event".

Library staff will respond to any disturbances or complaints regarding the usage of meeting rooms but do not generally supervise the actions or activities of any person or group utilizing the space.

Frederick County Public Libraries' Code of Conduct and Facilities Use Policy must be adhered to at all times. Alcohol may not be served in the Library or on its grounds.

Open flames are prohibited including candles and incense. Items, such as essential oils, with a heavy perfume or fragrance are also prohibited.

Sign language interpretation is supplied for Library programs only. Interpreter needs for meeting room reservations are the responsibility of the event organizer.

Accountability Statement

Concerns about the application of the Meeting Room Policy should be referred to the Meeting

Room Coordinator. The Branch Administrator will be the final arbiter of disagreements concerning the application of the policy and guidelines.

*Revised policy approved by the Board of Trustees of Frederick County Public Libraries 11/4/15.
Revised 9/7/22. Reaffirmed 9/2/26.*

Privacy

Frederick County Public Libraries takes the security and confidentiality of personal data very seriously. The Library does not retain records of customer account activity and personal data beyond what is necessary to conduct account operations properly. Library staff do not release such information to individuals or to any private or public agency. The Library will comply with all proper judicial processes, such as a government order to produce documents or information, while preserving customer confidentiality to the extent allowed by law. Library staff may access personal data stored in the library's computer system only for the purpose of performing their assigned library duties.

Credit card payments are processed in compliance with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard to ensure secure transactions.

Parents and/or legal guardians shall have complete access to the library records for all children's card accounts.

The Library uses the web analytics tool Google Analytics to gather information about library-maintained website usage. This tool uses cookies to collect statistical data such as browser type and operating system to determine usage patterns. Google Analytics collects this information anonymously and does not identify individuals or information about specific users. Library users may opt out of being tracked by Google Analytics without affecting their use of library-maintained websites at [HTTPS://SUPPORT.GOOGLE.COM/ANALYTICS](https://support.google.com/analytics).

*Adopted by the Board of Trustees of Frederick County Public Libraries on 6/6/12.
Revised 9/6/17, 9/6/23. Reaffirmed 9/2/26.*

Public Comments at Board of Trustees Meetings

A maximum of 30 minutes will be reserved for public comments at all Library Board meetings, 15 minutes at the beginning of the meeting and an additional 15 minutes at the end of the meeting. If more people wish to speak than time allows, public comments shall continue at the discretion of the board.

The board will hear public comments prior to voting on each agenda item. Public comments will follow staff presentation and board comments.

Persons desiring to speak should register 10 minutes prior to the scheduled meeting start time indicating (1) name of speaker, (2) topic(s) to be discussed, and (3) whether the speaker is speaking as an individual or representing an organization. Additional public comments may be solicited by the Board from individuals who have not signed up prior to the meeting.

Speakers shall be allotted up to three (3) minutes each and may not yield all or part of their time to anyone else.

If individuals have specific concerns relating to actions of staff members, such concerns may be communicated to the Director at any time.

*Adopted by the Board of Trustees of Frederick County Public Libraries 10/6/04. Revised 9/6/17.
Reaffirmed 9/2/26.*

Addendum A

Maryland Association of Public Library Administrators: Cooperative Borrowing Agreement

Maryland public library system believe in the spirit of cooperation in providing public service to the residents of Maryland. This agreement is separate from the policies and procedures set forth in the Maryland Interlibrary Organization agreement. This agreement does not apply to MARINA loans, please see Resource Sharing/Interlibrary Loan Agreement.

I. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. Maryland residents are eligible to use any Maryland public library system and check out materials subject to the lending system's current policies and procedures. The intent of this principle is so that non-county residents are able to borrow materials on the day they come to the library.
2. Library users will be governed by the rules of the library system from which they borrow or use materials.
3. The loaning library will use the bar code of the resident's existing library card, if possible, in order to register the resident into the library database.
4. All public library systems will accept for return materials borrowed from other library systems in the State subject to the receiving system's current policies and procedures. All public library systems will accept returned materials borrowed from other public library systems in the state and send them to the owning system.
5. All Maryland public library systems will adhere to the Cooperative Borrowing Agreement.

II. SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES

1. The lending library is responsible for notifying the customer of overdue materials and securing the return of these materials or payment for lost materials.
2. Library materials owned by one library system and returned to another library system will be cleared of all fines when they reach the owning library. Note: Other fees may still apply.

Updated July 17, 2018

Addendum B

ALA Library Bill of Rights

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following BASIC POLICIES should guide their services.

- I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.
- II. 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.
- III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
- IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.
- V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.
- VI. 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.
- VII. All people, regardless of origin, age, background, or views, possess a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use. Libraries should advocate for, educate about, and protect people's privacy, safeguarding all library use data, including personally identifiable information.

Adopted June 19, 1939, by the ALA Council; amended October 14, 1944; June 18, 1948; February 2, 1961; June 27, 1967; January 23, 1980; January 29, 2019; inclusion of "age" reaffirmed January 23, 1996, by the ALA Council.

Although the Articles of the *Library Bill of Rights* are unambiguous statements of basic principles that should govern the service of all libraries, questions do arise concerning application of these principles to specific library practices. See the documents designated by the Intellectual Freedom Committee as INTERPRETATIONS OF THE LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS.

Addendum C

American Library Association (ALA) Freedom to Read Statement:

[HTTP://WWW.ALA.ORG/ADVOCACY/INTFREEDOM/FREEDOMREADSTATEMENT](http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/freedomreadstatement)

The freedom to read is essential to our democracy. It is continuously under attack. Private groups and public authorities in various parts of the country are working to remove or limit access to reading materials, to censor content in schools, to label "controversial" views, to distribute lists of "objectionable" books or authors, and to purge libraries. These actions apparently rise from a view that our national tradition of free expression is no longer valid; that censorship and suppression are needed to counter threats to safety or national security, as well as to avoid the subversion of politics and the corruption of morals. We, as individuals devoted to reading and as librarians and publishers responsible for disseminating ideas, wish to assert the public interest in the preservation of the freedom to read.

Most attempts at suppression rest on a denial of the fundamental premise of democracy: that the ordinary individual, by exercising critical judgment, will select the good and reject the bad. We trust Americans to recognize propaganda and misinformation, and to make their own decisions about what they read and believe. We do not believe they are prepared to sacrifice their heritage of a free press in order to be "protected" against what others think may be bad for them. We believe they still favor free enterprise in ideas and expression.

These efforts at suppression are related to a larger pattern of pressures being brought against education, the press, art and images, films, broadcast media, and the Internet. The problem is not only one of actual censorship. The shadow of fear cast by these pressures leads, we suspect, to an even larger voluntary curtailment of expression by those who seek to avoid controversy or unwelcome scrutiny by government officials.

Such pressure toward conformity is perhaps natural to a time of accelerated change. And yet suppression is never more dangerous than in such a time of social tension. Freedom has given the United States the elasticity to endure strain. Freedom keeps open the path of novel and creative solutions, and enables change to come by choice. Every silencing of a heresy, every enforcement of an orthodoxy, diminishes the toughness and resilience of our society and leaves it the less able to deal with controversy and difference.

Now as always in our history, reading is among our greatest freedoms. The freedom to read and write is almost the only means for making generally available ideas or manners of expression that can initially command only a small audience. The written word is the natural medium for the new idea and the untried voice from which come the original contributions to social growth. It is essential to the extended discussion that serious thought requires, and to the accumulation of knowledge and ideas into organized collections.

We believe that free communication is essential to the preservation of a free society and a creative culture. We believe that these pressures toward conformity present the danger of limiting the range and variety of inquiry and expression on which our democracy and our culture depend. We believe that every American community must jealously guard the freedom to publish and to circulate, in order to preserve its own freedom to read. We believe that publishers and librarians have a profound responsibility to give validity to that freedom to read by making it possible for the readers to choose freely from a variety of offerings.

The freedom to read is guaranteed by the Constitution. Those with faith in free people will stand firm on these constitutional guarantees of essential rights and will exercise the responsibilities that accompany these rights.

We therefore affirm these propositions:

1. It is in the public interest for publishers and librarians to make available the widest diversity of views and expressions, including those that are unorthodox, unpopular, or considered dangerous by the majority. Creative thought is by definition new, and what is new is different. The bearer of every new thought is a rebel until that idea is refined and tested. Totalitarian systems attempt to maintain themselves in power by the ruthless suppression of any concept that challenges the established orthodoxy. The power of a democratic system to adapt to change is vastly strengthened by the freedom of its citizens to choose widely from among conflicting opinions offered freely to them. To stifle every nonconformist idea at birth would mark the end of the democratic process. Furthermore, only through the constant activity of weighing and selecting can the democratic mind attain the strength demanded by times like these. We need to know not only what we believe but why we believe it.

2. Publishers, librarians, and booksellers do not need to endorse every idea or presentation they make available. It would conflict with the public interest for them to establish their own political, moral, or aesthetic views as a standard for determining what should be published or circulated. Publishers and librarians serve the educational process by helping to make available knowledge and ideas required for the growth of the mind and the increase of learning. They do not foster education by imposing as mentors the patterns of their own thought. The people should have the freedom to read and consider a broader range of ideas than those that may be held by any single librarian or publisher or government or church. It is wrong that what one can read should be confined to what another thinks proper.

3. It is contrary to the public interest for publishers or librarians to bar access to writings on the basis of the personal history or political affiliations of the author. No art or literature can flourish if it is to be measured by the political views or private lives of its creators. No society of free people can flourish that draws up lists of writers to whom it will not listen, whatever they may have to say.

4. There is no place in our society for efforts to coerce the taste of others, to confine adults to the reading matter deemed suitable for adolescents, or to inhibit the efforts of writers to achieve artistic expression. To some, much of modern expression is shocking. But is not much of life itself shocking? We cut off literature at the source if we prevent writers from dealing with the stuff of life. Parents and teachers have a responsibility to prepare the young to meet the diversity of experiences in life to which they will be exposed, as they have a responsibility to help them learn to think critically for themselves. These are affirmative responsibilities, not to be discharged simply by preventing them from reading works for which they are not yet prepared. In these matters values differ, and values cannot be legislated; nor can machinery be devised that will suit the demands of one group without limiting the freedom of others.

5. It is not in the public interest to force a reader to accept the prejudgment of a label characterizing any expression or its author as subversive or dangerous. The ideal of labeling presupposes the existence of individuals or groups with wisdom to determine by authority what is good or bad for others. It presupposes that individuals must be directed in making up their minds about the ideas they examine. But Americans do not need others to do their thinking for them.

6. It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians, as guardians of the people's freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom by individuals or groups seeking to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large; and by the government whenever it seeks to reduce or deny public access to public information. It is inevitable in the give and take of the democratic process that the political, the moral, or the aesthetic concepts of an individual or group will occasionally collide with those of another individual or group. In a free society individuals are free to determine for themselves what they wish to read, and each group is free to determine what it will recommend to its freely associated members. But no group has the right to take the law into its own hands, and to impose its own concept of politics or morality upon other members of a democratic society. Freedom is no freedom if it is accorded only to the accepted and the inoffensive. Further, democratic societies are more safe, free, and creative when the free flow of public information is not restricted by governmental prerogative or self-censorship.

7. It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians to give full meaning to the freedom to read by providing books that enrich the quality and diversity of thought and expression. By the exercise of this affirmative responsibility, they can demonstrate that the answer to a "bad" book is a good one, the answer to a "bad" idea is a good one. The freedom to read is of little consequence when the reader cannot obtain matter fit for that reader's purpose. What is needed is not only the absence of restraint, but the positive provision of opportunity for the people to read the best that has been thought and said. Books are the major channel by which the intellectual inheritance is handed down, and the principal means of its testing and growth. The defense of the freedom to read requires of all publishers and librarians the utmost of their faculties, and deserves of all Americans the fullest of their support.

We state these propositions neither lightly nor as easy generalizations. We here stake out a lofty claim for the value of the written word. We do so because we believe that it is possessed of enormous variety and usefulness, worthy of cherishing and keeping free. We realize that the application of these propositions may mean the dissemination of ideas and manners of expression that are repugnant to many persons. We do not state these propositions in the comfortable belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe rather that what people read is deeply important; that ideas can be dangerous; but that the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society. Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours.

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