

Comments at Hanover School Committee meeting 12/7/22

Re: 1st reading Policy Section I First Reading of Policy IJL/IJL-R (Library Material)

Good evening. My name is Jennifer Varney and I am the President of the Massachusetts School Library Association. Thank you for reading my comments - I commend the Hanover School Department for attempting to create a robust library Selection and Reconsideration Policy. There are several points in the draft policy that I could comment on but I would like to focus my time here tonight on two points.

The first is the statement that the building principal may withdraw materials from the library catalog. This is an unusual statement to have in a selection policy and one that does not represent best practice. If a building principal wishes a book to be removed from the library catalog, then he or she can and should begin the reconsideration process. Allowing the principal to remove books from the library circumvents due process - the process exists to allow a group representing the community to make a decision on behalf of that community. Please allow the reconsideration process to work on behalf of all members of a community instead of leaving these decisions in the hands of the building principal. One person should not have this responsibility alone.

The other point I would like to make tonight is that it is established best practice for a book to remain on the library shelves and accessible to students even while a challenge is being considered, and this should explicitly be written into the policy. If the decision of the reconsideration is to remove the book, that is the time for it to be taken off of the shelves. Removing the book before that time violates the first amendment rights of students to read from a wide variety of sources and perspectives. It is important not to abridge those rights by removing a book prior to a decision being made.

Thank you very much for listening to my comments. I am more than happy to respond to questions or talk further.

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