

HANDLING COMPLAINTS

When an individual or group attempts to prevent the free exchange of ideas by having materials removed from any library on the basis of moral or political grounds the LLA Intellectual Freedom Committee recommends the following steps:

1. Implement the steps included in **Before the Censor Comes: How to Protect Yourself and Your Collection**.
2. Remain calm and do not take the complaint personally. Listen to the patron's objections in a courteous and respectful manner.
3. Explain to the concerned individual that you appreciate his/her interest and that your parish/school district has a policy and a procedure for handling such situations.
4. Try to defuse the situation without committing the library to any specific course of action. In many instances patrons do not want to lodge a formal complaint; rather they merely want to express their views. Do not put the patron on the spot by characterizing the complaint as a threat to the library.
5. Do not indicate if there have been previous complaints about the book or provide reviews at this point.
6. If the situation cannot be resolved through discussion and reasoning, initiate the reconsideration procedures as set forth in the library's Materials Selection Policy or the Library Service Policy. The reconsideration process will vary from library to library, but in every instance it should be fair and expeditious.
7. Give the complainant a reconsideration form to fill out and make sure it is signed..
8. Notify your administrator of the challenge, and stress the importance of following your selection policy. If requested, schedule a meeting to discuss the policies and procedures with the complainant.
9. Report the incident to the LLA Intellectual Freedom Committee by completing the Request for Assistance Form. If support from other agencies is needed, contact the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual freedom.
10. Once the request for reconsideration has been reviewed, communicate the results of the process to the initiator in writing, explaining the procedure and justifying the final decision.
11. If the incident involves confidentiality of library records, cite the "Library Registration and Circulation Records" provision of the Louisiana Revised Statutes (La. R. S. 44:13), which protects the privacy of individuals' circulation records. As used in this section, the term 'registration records' includes any information which a library requires a patron to provide in order to become eligible to borrow books and other materials. The term "circulation records" includes all records "indicating which of [the library's] documents or other materials, regardless of format, have been loaned to or used by an identifiable individual or group of individuals." Except in cases specifically addressed in this statute regarding criminal activity in the library, attorneys and law enforcement officials seeking such information must present a subpoena establishing that the information requested is relevant to an ongoing investigation or case. Any subpoena should be examined by the library's legal counsel.
12. Generally it is better to avoid making the incident a public issue, but if this should happen, seek support of the local media and intellectual freedom support groups.