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STATE OF ALABAMA

September 1, 2023

Dr. Nancy C. Pack, Director
Alabama Public Library Service
6030 Monticello Dr.
Montgomery, AL 36117

Dear Dr. Pack:

I am writing to express concern—and to seek answers—about the environment our Alabama libraries are providing to families and children.

Public libraries play a vital role in our communities. They facilitate research and learning. They provide recreation. And they promote literacy by fostering a love of reading that will improve our citizens' lives and uplift our State's communities. Regardless of background or income, Alabama libraries are—or should be—a safe place for *all* individuals in a community, including families and children, to read, learn, and explore.

Especially given libraries' importance to society, I have grown increasingly concerned due to recent reports calling into question whether our own libraries here in Alabama are most effectively fulfilling this important mission.

The heart of the issue seems to be the exposure of children and youth to inappropriate, sexually suggestive materials without adequate means of parental supervision. According to reports, the children's section of the Foley Public Library has featured a book called *Who are You?: The Kid's Guide to Gender Identity*, which is marketed to five- to eight-year olds for "understanding and celebrating the gender diversity that surrounds us." The Prattville Public Library's toddler and children's section, meanwhile, has reportedly featured *The Pronoun Book*, a board book for three-year olds to learn about "preferred pronouns," and *If You're A Kid Like Gavin*, which is a self-proclaimed story about "gender transition" targeted at children between four and eight years old. Most recently, it has come to light that the Ozark Dale County Library's young adult section—which serves library patrons as young as 12 and 13 years old—has featured *The Mirror Season* and *Only Mostly Devastated*, both of which feature graphic sex scenes.

This list could go on, but the important point, as I understand it, is that each of these books has been made freely available in the very part of the library where children and youth are most likely to browse. As several parents have eloquently put it, their concern is not about removing these books. The concern is about ensuring that these books are placed in an appropriate location. In

other words, the parents are saying, if our children and youth are going to encounter these books at all, it should be because of a considered family decision, not the whims of a local library.

Rather than supporting Alabama families, out-of-state library groups like the American Library Association appear to be making the situation worse. The ALA's "Library Bill of Rights"—which the Alabama Public Library Service has adopted as its own—says that a person's library use should not be abridged because of "age." Not to be misunderstood, the ALA's website regarding youth access to library resources clarifies that "like adults, children and teens have the right to find the information they choose," so libraries must not "discriminate" based on "age." Even more startling, the Library Bill of Rights further provides that all people, regardless of age, "possess a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use"—a statement that appears to directly contravene Alabama's law giving parents access to their children's library records.

Considering the foregoing facts, it is not surprising that Alabama parents are raising concerns about both the content on display in some Alabama libraries as well as the general approach of Alabama libraries towards parental involvement. I share these concerns and believe that the responsible thing to do is seek more information that may be useful in considering whether reform is necessary—and if so, what reforms to make.

For these reasons, I request your assistance in answering the following questions as soon as possible, and in any event, before the next meeting of your executive board on September 13th:

1. What measures has the Alabama Public Library Service taken to ensure that local libraries are providing parents with means to supervise their children and youth before encountering age-inappropriate materials?
2. What role has the Library Service played in advising local libraries about screening inappropriate content in libraries or making determinations as to whether library content is inappropriate for children?
3. In the past year, has the Library Service received any complaints from parents about the display of age-inappropriate materials? For each such complaint, please provide a summary of the complaint and the Library Service's (or local library's) response. Please also provide copies of any written correspondence in your possession concerning parents' complaints about age-inappropriate materials.
4. To receive supplemental state library aid, local libraries must submit to the Library Service, among other things, written policies addressing such topics as "patrons," "materials selection," and "special services groups." To what extent do the written policies submitted by local libraries facilitate parental supervision over their children's library browsing? Please provide examples of such policies submitted to the Library Service in support of a local library's request for supplemental state aid.

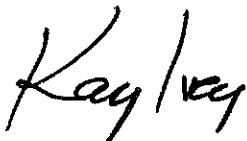
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5. Are you aware of any model library policies (from any jurisdiction) that support parental supervision of children and youth library browsing? If so, please provide examples. If not, please research the matter and provide a summary of your findings, including examples.
6. What role have you or the Library Service played in advising local libraries about hosting events organized by concerned parents, including any events in Millbrook or Madison?
7. Please provide an itemized account of how much money the Library Service has paid to the American Library Association over the past five years. For each expenditure, please explain the purpose of the expenditure and what benefit the Library Service received from it.
8. To what extent does the Alabama Public Library Service have existing policies or procedures that incorporate ALA rules or standards? Does the Library Service otherwise rely on ALA materials—or advise local libraries to rely on ALA materials—for any purpose (such as reading lists)? To the extent the Library Service encourages use of ALA suggested reading lists for children and youth, please describe what steps the Library Service takes to vet the lists for age appropriateness and to facilitate parents' rights to guide their children in accessing these books.
9. What role does the ALA play in the operation or administration of local libraries? Are you aware of local library affiliations with the ALA? To what extent have local libraries adopted the ALA's "Library Bill of Rights"?

I am deeply grateful for the work Alabama libraries do, day in and day out, to engage our children and promote a lifelong love of learning—including by providing information that may be unavailable elsewhere in a community. At the same time, however, I respect parents who want their young children and teens to be able to freely explore a library without fear of what those children will find there.

I am confident that we can improve our Alabama libraries and better enable them to fulfill their important mission. For the sake of Alabama taxpayers and families, we simply must get this right.

Sincerely,



Kay Ivey
Governor

cc: Members of the Alabama Public Library Service Executive Board