

April 14, 2008

To: Nampa Public Library Board of Trustees

From: Undersigned Staff Members of the Nampa Public Library

We, the undersigned staff of the Nampa Public Library, express our deep concern and disappointment with the Board's majority decision to remove the books, *The New Joy of Sex* and *The Joy of Gay Sex* from the library shelves. We feel that the Board's decision has and will have severe consequences that will affect the future of the Nampa Public Library.

Idaho State Code 33-2601 states that "an independent, nonpartisan board shall govern the library." Idaho State Code 33-2604 states that "appointment to the board shall be made solely upon the consideration of such appointees to serve the interest of the people, without regard to sex, age, race, nationality, religion, disability or political affiliation." We are concerned about the Board's interpretation of representing the public interest. People bring a multitude of beliefs to our world and to our community. We understand that distinguishing between the "person" and the "public" can be difficult. Library staff members, like everyone else, have certain beliefs that we hold dear, however, we put aside our personal views on a daily basis to best serve the community as a whole. While it would be easier, perhaps, if everyone held the same beliefs, it is not the role of the library, staff, or the Board to decide what these beliefs should be. Our role is not that of "moral guide" for the public. We feel that it is the Board's responsibility to speak and act in the interest of the entire public, not just vocal members of the public. We feel it is important that you understand that representing the public is not representing just one morality, or one minority group. It is representing all moralities within the law, all minorities, and the majority, regardless of the flavor. The intent of the state law is to ensure nonpolitical, unbiased motivation in the governance of the library. The library's collection of materials represents the variety and diversity of the world in general and the community of Nampa. It is not our responsibility to tell the community what to believe or not to believe. By removing these books from the shelves, we have, in fact, done just that! The library is public and the Board exists to serve the interests of the public regardless of personal opinions. We urge each Board member to set aside their personal sense of morality, prejudices and beliefs to best serve the interests of the citizens of this community, ALL of them.

The Library Board has violated some of the basic tenets of the Library Bill of Rights. Library customers have the right to unrestricted access to information, and by removing these books from the shelves, their right to that access has been violated. These books provide valuable viewpoints out of the many viewpoints represented by the library's diverse collection. People have the right to access this information when they need or want it. Forcing library customers to ask a staff member for access to these books from a locked office violates their right to privacy and confidentiality. Customers have the right to "open inquiry without having their interests examined or scrutinized by others" (ALA Bill of Rights Privacy Interpretation). Items that have been sequestered carry the stigma

of being inappropriate or unsuitable. If customers cannot take the items from the shelves anonymously, they may feel too intimidated to ask for an item they really need in fear of being judged or embarrassed.

The Library Board has expressed concern about the children of this community. It was said that the books were pulled from the shelves and put behind locked doors “for the sake of the children.” Library staff members are concerned about the message that is sent to the public regarding the rights of parents and children. Pulling the books from public access sends the message that certain community members have the right to determine what parents or their children may or may not read. Volumes available from a commercial source, such as a bookstore, create an economic barrier as well. It is the right of every parent to teach their children what they feel is morally right and morally wrong - to determine what is correct for their children to read. By pulling the books from the shelves, the Board has sent the message that somehow parents cannot be trusted to decide what their children can or cannot read and that parents who do choose to allow their children access to controversial material are bad parents. We, the staff of the Nampa Public Library, want to support all parents in the decisions they make regarding the intellectual growth of the next generation. As concerned adults, parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents, we are also troubled and disturbed about what this decision does for the future rights of our children to grow up in a free society. It is more damaging for our children to lose that freedom, than to possibly see a book with controversial material. By placing controversial material behind closed doors, we are telling our children that intellectual pursuits are only acceptable, even in a democracy, when those pursuits agree with the most vocal members of society.

The protection of unsupervised children has become a reason for pulling the books from the shelves. Every public gathering place has dangerous aspects. The library is often tagged with gang graffiti and has been a location for possible gang recruitment in the past. The truth is that parents have to teach and trust that their children know what is appropriate whenever they are alone in a public place. The least of our worries should be two books, kept in the adult section, on a high shelf, far removed from the children’s section of the library.

The New Joy of Sex and *The Joy of Gay Sex* have been previously challenged by Mr. Jackson and his group. They have also been challenged at other libraries across the United States. Time after time, the material in these books has been proven to be useful, informative, and highly recommended by many different reviewers and librarians who are experts in their fields. Both books are regarded as having some of the best and most accurate and up-to-date information on their topics. According to the library Collection Development Policy, this is exactly the type of material that belongs in our collection –it represents a diversity of viewpoints and provides excellent information. Mr. Jackson and his group have made many disparaging remarks against library administration and the selection team in their choice of books. Let it be known that these books were selected by trained librarians with years of selection experience, carefully considered, and well-reviewed. By choosing to remove these items, even temporarily, the Library Board has sent a message to library administration, staff, and the community that our training and

expertise in our profession can be ignored and nullified by those who wish to further their own personal agendas and that our own Board does not trust the library administration and staff to be professional enough to make good selection decisions. We are disappointed.

The library Vision, Mission and Values statement was included in the Collection Development Policy which was approved by the Board in December 2007. Following are the parts of the statements that we feel have been disregarded in making your decision about these items.

Values:

*We value our customers' right to seek and receive accurate and complete information without bias.

*We value our customers' right to find a diversity of opinions, ideas and information.

*We value and protect our customers' right to privacy.

*We value the responsibility and right of all parents and guardians to guide their own children's use of the library and its resources and services.

Mission:

As the gateway to an ever-changing world of information, we deliver excellent library service to our community. We create an inviting gathering place to inspire and promote lifelong learning and love of reading through **free access** to dynamic library resources, services and programs.

Vision:

Knowledgeable staff with a strong commitment to intellectual freedom and diversity of opinion provide help to learners at all educational levels.

As part of the newly adopted Collection Development Policy the Board states:

“The Library Board maintains the position that while anyone is free to reject for himself or herself materials of which they do not approve, he or she cannot exercise censorship to restrict the freedom of use and access to others. The choice of library materials is also an individual matter. The responsibility for the reading and use of library materials by minors rests ultimately and completely with their parents or legal guardians. It is the duty and responsibility of the library staff to provide advice and reading guidance, but the right of minors to free choice of materials shall not be abridged by the library staff.”

“Items in any format are not necessarily excluded because of language, frankness, sexually explicit passages or images, or because of objections by staff, trustees, or the public. Individual passages or illustrations in whatever format or medium, when taken out of context or purpose, are not considered adequate reason for the rejection or removal of an item.”

By placing the books in the Director's office, the Board has gone against the mission, vision and values of the library. We are concerned that these statements, which staff members and board members helped develop and have worked by, are now null and void with the Board's decision to sequester these books. If we can no longer provide free access to materials or practice intellectual freedom, or value our customers' right of free choice, we would like to know – what the Library's mission, vision, or values will be? Why have you seemingly chosen to ignore, or suddenly change, a well-crafted collection development policy – one that was adopted by you only four months ago in favor of a minority view? We ask the Board to please answer these questions and please tell us where we go from here. This decision could change the way the Nampa Library operates in the future, especially if policies are suddenly changed to fit in with what a few people think a library should be, people who are not librarians or staff, or people who believe that our first amendment rights only pertain to their point of view.

Lastly, we would like the Board to consider the precedent that will be set if these books remain sequestered in the Director's office. By giving in to the personal opinions of a vocal minority group, the Board is inviting that group and others like them to come into the library, go through the collection, and decide that there are many other items that do not quite fit into their personal agendas or beliefs. This will allow them to decide for others what they can and cannot read and will again put the library and Board in the position to possibly remove other items that may be useful to the public as a whole. We, the undersigned staff of the Nampa Public Library, request that the Library Board reconsider their decision to sequester *The New Joy of Sex* and *The Joy of Gay Sex* and return them to their rightful place on the adult nonfiction shelves.

Respectfully submitted,

Concerned Library Staff Members