



**Report to:** Stratford Public Library Board  
**Meeting Date:** December 7, 2021  
**From:** Julia Merritt, CEO  
**Subject:** CFLA Position Statement on Intellectual Freedom

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**Canadian Federation of Library Associations (formerly Canadian Library Association) “Position Statement on Intellectual Freedom and Libraries”**

Approval History: CLA: June 27, 1974. Amended November 17, 1983; November 18, 1985; September 27, 2015. CFLA-FCAB: Adopted August 26, 2016; Reviewed April 12, 2019.

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The Canadian Federation of Library Associations recognizes and values the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as the guarantor of the fundamental freedoms in Canada of conscience and religion; of thought, belief, opinion, and expression; of peaceful assembly; and of association.

The Canadian Federation of Library Associations supports and promotes the universal principles of intellectual freedom as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which include the interlocking freedoms to hold opinions and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

In accordance with these principles, the Canadian Federation of Library Associations affirms that all persons in Canada have a fundamental right, subject only to the Constitution and the law, to have access to the full range of knowledge, imagination, ideas, and opinion, and to express their thoughts publicly. Only the courts may abridge free expression rights in Canada.

The Canadian Federation of Library Associations affirms further that libraries have a core responsibility to support, defend and promote the universal principles of intellectual freedom and privacy.

The Canadian Federation of Library Associations holds that libraries are a key institution in Canada for rendering expressive content accessible and affordable to all. Libraries are essential gateways for all persons living in Canada to advance themselves through literacy, lifelong learning, social engagement, and cultural enrichment.



Libraries have a core responsibility to safeguard and facilitate access to constitutionally protected expressions of knowledge, imagination, ideas, and opinion, including those which some individuals and groups consider unconventional, unpopular or unacceptable. To this end, in accordance with their mandates and professional values and standards, libraries provide, defend and promote equitable access to the widest possible variety of expressive content and resist calls for censorship and the adoption of systems that deny or restrict access to resources.

Libraries have a core responsibility to safeguard and foster free expression and the right to safe and welcoming places and conditions. To this end, libraries make available their public spaces and services to individuals and groups without discrimination.

Libraries have a core responsibility to safeguard and defend privacy in the individual's pursuit of expressive content. To this end, libraries protect the identities and activities of library users except when required by the courts to cede them.

Furthermore, in accordance with established library policies, procedures and due process, libraries resist efforts to limit the exercise of these responsibilities while recognizing the right of criticism by individuals and groups.

Library employees, volunteers and employers as well as library governing entities have a core responsibility to uphold the principles of intellectual freedom in the performance of their respective library roles.

You can find CFLA-FCAB's Position on Third Party Use of Publicly Funded Library Meetings Rooms and Facilities: An Interpretation of the Canadian Federation of Library Associations' Statement on Intellectual Freedom and Libraries [here](#).

## **Background**

The Stratford Public Library Board last reviewed this position statement in 2015; it had previously adopted this position statement as one of the guiding principles of SPL in December 2000. It remains a fundamental principle of professional librarianship across Canada.

In 2021, libraries are encountering an increasing number of what we call "challenges" to materials being held in library collections. Challenges to intellectual freedom can run a complete range from calls for criminal charges and banning the book from being held in collections



<https://lithub.com/a-parent-wants-to-criminally-prosecute-librarians-for-distributing-a-book-about-a-genderqueer-kid/>

<https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-politics-and-policy/south-carolina-governor-calls-lgbtq-book-banned-schools-rcna5409>

to the shooting of writers, cartoonists, and police officers in Paris on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015. These are sad reminders that the principles that Canadian libraries take for granted are not universally supported or respected. It is an opportunity to reflect how libraries represent intellectual freedom and democracy in our society. The ability to think, read, write, and speak freely are all values that public libraries espouse and work hard to support through our collections, programs, and philosophy of service.

Libraries have often acted as guardians of those freedoms; refusing to ban or censor the inclusion of materials or topics that people may find objectionable. Likewise, they make great efforts to protect the privacy of everyone to access any information, whether for research, personal curiosity, or entertainment.

For example, at SPL:

- Items are not ordinarily removed from the collection due to objections from any person(s), unless in contravention of the Human Rights Code or other legislation.
  - o Note: this does not preclude the Library from choosing not to buy any particular item, or removing it from the collection. As part of the selection process, the validity and reliability of the information is evaluated, and weighed against the needs of this specific community. Items are periodically evaluated and may be removed due to lack of interest by the community, poor physical condition, or obsolescence.
- After an item is returned, the record of who had borrowed it is deleted. With the exception of the items currently in use by a customer, the Library has no way to access records of what an individual has read or accessed. Library records are not sold, mined for data, or provided to any individual or corporation, with the exception of a formal request by the Police.

It is important to remember that although the daily routine of the Library can seem mundane, they support the continued existence of a larger set of principles that benefit our entire society.



### **Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommend that the SPL reaffirm its endorsement of the updated CFLA statement as written above.

This endorsement will provide the staff a renewed commitment to follow these precepts as they navigate the changing social tolerance for different perspectives.