December 7, 2017

Dr. Lance Hindt  
Superintendent  
Katy Independent School District  
6301 South Stadium Lane  
Katy, TX 77494  

Dear Dr. Hindt,

We are a coalition of literary, artistic and educational organizations dedicated to promoting free expression and fighting the suppression of free speech. We offer support and guidance to educators in protecting the right of students to read freely. We wish to extend such support to Katy Independent School District (Katy ISD) as you prepare to review *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas.

**We strongly urge you to abide by the First Amendment and Katy ISD policies by returning *The Hate U Give* to your library shelves while a committee of trained reviewers assesses the book’s literary and educational merits.**

We understand that at a school board meeting on November 6, the parent of a Katy junior high school student read an excerpt from *The Hate U Give* aloud and objected to “profane” language used in the book. Consequently, the book was pulled from all school library shelves in the district, pending further review of its alleged “pervasive vulgarity and racially insensitive language.”

Our concerns are twofold. First, the premature removal of the book from library circulation pending review violates students’ right to access information and your own policy. Second, depriving students of the opportunity to safely explore the challenging themes addressed in the book diminishes their exposure to underrepresented voices that enhance their education.

Katy ISD’s policies on challenged resources seem to adequately protect students’ First Amendment rights. For instance, [Policy EF](https://example.com/policy) clearly states that “[a]ccess to a challenged resource shall not be restricted during the reconsideration process, except the District may deny access to a child if requested by the child’s parent.” However, your December 5 statement indicates that the policy has not been followed in this instance as “the book ‘The Hate U Give’ was recently removed from the libraries at Katy ISD while an administrative review process is conducted.”
The Supreme Court has ruled that such actions violate the First Amendment, cautioning that “[l]ocal school boards may not remove books from library shelves simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books and seek by their removal to ‘prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion.’” *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853, 872 (1982)(plurality opinion). In the specific case of removal of *library* books, the Supreme Court also established that public school officials’ discretion is particularly limited to ensure the protection of students’ First Amendment right to access information because “students must always remain free to inquire, to study, and to evaluate, to gain new maturity and understanding ” and “the school library is the principal locus of such freedom.” *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853, 868-69 (1982)(plurality opinion). While school officials have some discretion to remove “pervasively vulgar” or “educationally unsuitable” materials, they must do so “in a manner that comports with the transcendent imperatives of the First Amendment.” *Id.* at 864.

**Restricting students’ access to library books before completing a review of educational suitability and use of profanity does not align with First Amendment imperatives. It privileges the opinions of complainants and undermines viewpoint neutrality.**

*The Hate U Give* is neither pervasively vulgar nor educationally unsuitable. This novel tells the story of a 16-year old black student who – like far too many teens in America – witnesses the traumatic shooting of her unarmed best friend by a white police officer and courageously advocates for justice, discovering her own agency in the process. Author Angie Thomas has been widely praised for her deft writing on the deeply entrenched racial prejudice and police brutality that continue to plague American society, “forcing you to remember not only the victim who died but the victim who lived” (*Slate*, April 2017). *Kirkus Reviews* magazine and *Publishers Weekly* regard this *National Book Award Finalist* and Boston Globe-Horn Book Award winner as “necessary, important” and “heartbreakingly topical.”

Books provide a safe space for students to explore difficult issues and ideas as they grow into a greater understanding of themselves and the world around them. For young readers in Katy school district, especially those who seek to better understand the many layers of the country where they live, *The Hate U Give* offers both insight and inspiration.

One parent’s judgment of *The Hate U Give* should not be imposed on the entire Katy ISD community. While not every library book will be perfectly suited to every reader’s tolerance or taste, Katy ISD libraries serve a diverse community of readers with varied experiences, perspectives and interests. **Rather than deprive interested readers of the opportunity to engage with *The Hate U Give* based on one opinion, we urge you to return the novel to library shelves while the committee conducts its review. We also ask that the committee focus on the educational value of this book and the story it tells when making its determination.**
Please do not hesitate to contact us for further assistance on securing the First Amendment rights of Katy ISD's students.

Sincerely,

Chris Finan, Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

Charles Brownstein, Executive Director
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund

Dan Cullen, Strategic Development Officer
American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression

Mary Rasenberger, Executive Director
Authors Guild

Sofia Castillo, Staff Attorney
Association of American Publishers

Millie Davis, Senior Developer
National Council of Teachers of English

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