January 12, 2018

Temple Library Board
c/o Alicia Vasquez avasquez@templetx.gov
2 N Main Street
Temple, TX 76501

Dear Temple Library Board:

Our coalition of literary, artistic and educational organizations recently learned of your intention to develop a library display policy in response to a petition by the evangelical organization, Concerned Christian Citizens (CCC).

As organizations dedicated to promoting freedom of expression, we routinely advise public institutions that are in the process of developing such policies and best practices to ensure they are in keeping with First Amendment principles. To that end, we offer you some considerations that you may want to take into account when addressing the specific issues raised by CCC.

When organizing book displays, libraries should seek to represent diverse viewpoints that reflect the community they serve. However, no single display can possibly contain all viewpoints on a particular issue; nor is there any requirement that it should.

As public institutions, libraries may welcome displays from outside organizations that showcase their diverse viewpoints thereby enriching public discourse. In considering such proposals, public libraries may determine the time, space and manner in which the materials are exhibited, but they have a constitutional obligation to remain neutral when it comes to the viewpoints expressed in the materials on display.

Like other public institutions, libraries may also speak on their own behalf and freely choose the messages they wish to communicate with no obligation to show every viewpoint on a subject. For example, a public library may choose to erect a
display of books celebrating Jazz Appreciation Month and need not also showcase books about classical music. Nor does a display celebrating free speech on the occasion of Banned Books Week need to include books arguing for the value of censorship, even if some members of the community hold different views on these issues.

Currently, libraries are working to be more inclusive of a diverse array of voices through multilingual books, visual art displays and performances reflecting their community’s cultural traditions. Libraries are free to independently organize displays that promote underrepresented voices or that celebrate the achievements of marginalized social and political groups. Thus, a display celebrating Black History Month need not include books representing racist views; a display celebrating Women’s History Month need not include books about the achievements of men; and likewise, a display celebrating LGBT Pride Month need not include books arguing the immorality of non-heterosexual orientations.

Further information can be found in “Exhibit Spaces and Bulletin Boards: an Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights” (although it primarily deals with community exhibits, rather than library sponsored ones) at:
http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/exhibitspaces

In addition, “Museum Best Practices for Managing Controversy” is a valuable resource to apply to libraries mounting exhibits or providing visual resources:
http://ncac.org/resource/museum-best-practices-for-managing-controversy

Please do not hesitate to contact us for further guidance or clarification.

Sincerely,

Chris Finan, Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

James LaRue, Executive Director
ALA - Office of Intellectual Freedom

Cc:
Leigh Gardner
Library Director
email: lgardner@templetx.gov

Brynn Myers
Interim Temple City Manager
email: bmyers@templetx.gov