

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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Greg DiTullio
Board President
Pine-Richland School Board
702 Warrendale Rd.
Gibsonia, PA 15044-6040

Re: Recent book ban push in the district

Dear President DiTullio and Pine-Richland School Board members:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to urge you to resist the recent requests to begin banning books in the District based on primarily on anti-LGBT animus and sexual content taken out of context, and to underscore that if you choose to ban books based on the inclusion of sexual content then you must ban the bible as well. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 40,000 members across the country, including more than 1,100 members in Pennsylvania. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

It is our understanding that at the Board's most recent meeting on October 23, 2023, several attendees demanded that the Board ban a dozen books because the books contain material that is "sexually explicit."¹ We understand that many of these book banning proponents were not from the area, including controversial pastor John Amanchukwu, who has pushed for book bans at many school boards across the country, including in Colorado, California, Florida, Nevada and North Carolina.² We understand that many of the attendees threatened to vote you out if you do not give in to their demand and that the list of books that should be banned included classics like "The Handmaid's Tale" and "Push." We understand that the Board plans to take further action in response to this book banning push at its meeting on November 13.

We write to request that you resist this insidious book banning and not ban books based on sexual content taken out of context. You should trust students and parents to determine what is appropriate for their children to read and not purge your libraries of all books that contain any sexually explicit content. If you do begin banning any books with sexually explicit content, then you must apply this policy neutrally and ban the bible as well.

The bible contains sexually explicit content, and if the District begins banning any materials with sexually explicit content it must be removed from your schools. The District cannot ban books based on the

¹<https://www.cbsnews.com/pittsburgh/news/pine-richland-school-district-parents-challenge-12-school-library-books/>

²<https://triblive.com/news/top-stories/pine-richland-to-reconsider-school-library-policy-after-complaints-about-books/>

viewpoint expressed. If books like “Push” and “The Handmaid’s Tale” are deemed to be too extreme for students, then so too is the bible.

In the bible, rape is not only described, but the victims are forced to marry their rapists.³ One bible story tells of a prostitute who “lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of horses,” who “longed for the lewdness of your youth, when . . . [her] bosom was caressed and your young breasts fondled.”⁴ This same story speaks about sex toys: you “took the fine jewelry I gave you, the jewelry made of my gold and silver, and you made for yourself male idols and engaged in prostitution with them.”⁵ Another book of the bible has a character who prays, “may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love.”⁶ In yet another bible story, a future husband purchases a wife by killing 200 of her fathers’ enemies, mutilating their corpses, and bringing back their foreskins as a dowry.⁷ Another sordid and preposterous story that defames incest victims recounts the exploits of two daughters who, having just witnessed a genocide and the murder of their mother by a pyromaniacal god, supposedly got their father drunk and seduced him in order to bear his children.⁸ Yet another book describes sperm, intercourse, menstruation, homosexuality, bestiality, adultery and whores.⁹ Another depicts a holy man impaling a woman through her belly and describes in loving detail how to steal and rape virgins as war booty.¹⁰ Yet another tale tells how a woman has her hand cut off for touching a man’s penis.¹¹ In other passages, women’s skirts are lifted over their face so their nakedness and shame can be exposed to all.¹² Another tale describes a man touching a woman’s “hole of the door” and how her “bowels were moved for him.”¹³

These and many more unpalatable and sexually explicit stories are found in the various books of the bible. Our educational association has published a brochure, *An X-Rated Book: Sex & Obscenity In the Bible*, which exposes nearly 150 bible verses displaying a “pornographic view of sex and women, lewdness, depravity and sexual violence often ordered or countenanced by the biblical deity.” It can be read for free on our website.¹⁴

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker has written an entire book on the evils of the bible, *GOD: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction*. Chapters document “divinely” ordered genocide, infanticide and filicide, among many other atrocities, as well as the biblical deity’s racism, sexism, slavemongering and sadomasochism. An interactive companion website details all of this and more.¹⁵ These verses are one reason why FFRF makes available bible warning labels to place on hotel bibles saying, “Warning: Literal belief in this book may endanger your health and life.”¹⁶

The bible historically is doubtless the single-most weaponized piece of writing on the planet, responsible for unjust wars, genocide, anti-semitism, violent extremism, subjugation of women and pervasive racism. Throughout the Crusades, the Inquisition, the witch hunts, chattel slavery, the Holocaust, and the history

³ Deuteronomy 22:28–29.

⁴ Ezekiel 23:20–21.

⁵ Ezekiel 16:17.

⁶ Proverbs 5:19.

⁷ 1 Samuel 18:27.

⁸ Genesis 19.

⁹ Leviticus.

¹⁰ Numbers.

¹¹ Deuteronomy 25:11–12.

¹² Nahum 3:5.

¹³ Song of Solomon 5:4.

¹⁴ Available at ffrf.org/component/k2/item/23733-an-x-rated-book-sex-obscenity-in-the-bible.

¹⁵ Available at unpleasant.ffrf.org/.

¹⁶ Available at ffrf.org/shop/accessories/bumper-stickers-15/bible-warning-labels-skull-crossbones-78-detail.

of homophobia, the bible looms large. As *Born Again Skeptic's Guide to the Bible*¹⁷ author Ruth Hurmence Green eloquently put it, “There was a time when religion ruled the world. It is known as the Dark Ages.”

It is important to note that removal of the bible would not constitute hostility toward Christianity or religion. The District must hold religious texts to the same standards it holds all other library books, review them, and, if they contain the same inappropriate content as the other removed books, must also remove them under the District's standards. Removing the bible for its obscenity and graphic sexual content based on neutral criteria is not religious discrimination.

FFRF advocates, above all, for freedom of thought. We oppose the concept of banning books from school libraries. We believe that there is no true freedom of thought, conscience or even religion, unless our government and its public schools are free from religion and its control over thought. We are deeply familiar with the haunting history of censorship—from the Catholic Church's Index Librorum Prohibitorum, to the Comstock laws, to the Nazi book burnings, the attacks on authors such as Charles Darwin and Salman Rushdie, and the murders of Bangladeshi bloggers such as Avijit Roy. Heinrich Heine famously observed, “Where they burn books, they will end in burning human beings.” History never looks kindly on book censors and burners.

The best solution is to leave a diversity of viewpoints in school libraries, and trust students to explore complex topics themselves by not banning books from school libraries. The “inappropriate” sections of the majority of books targeted by groups advocating for book bans are typically minor parts of books that have literary value. Reading takes time, and understanding books critically takes even more thought. Those who propose book bans target gullible audiences with selective material. They fear free inquiry and independence of thought. Much of the book banning impetus is manufactured, with pre-made lists of books and quotes circulated by self-righteous grandstanders who are hostile to critical thinking. In short, the current wave of book banning is not about protecting children, it is about discouraging thought.

We hope that the District will not start removing books from school libraries based on content taken out of context. However, if the District establishes a standard for inappropriate content that targets sexually explicit materials, you must be even-handed and remove the bible as well. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Christopher Line
Staff Attorney
Freedom From Religion Foundation

¹⁷ <https://shop.ffrf.org/product/born-again-skeptics-guide-to-the-bible/>