

**EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING  
ALABAMA PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE  
MAY 8, 2025**

The Executive Board of the Alabama Public Library Service (APLS) met on May 8, 2025 at the Alabama Public Library Service building in Montgomery, Alabama. A quorum was present and prior notice was given as required by the Alabama Open Meetings Act and Act #2022-421.

Chairman John Wahl called the Executive Board Regular Meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. and roll was taken. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and said he appreciates their service on the Board.

The following Board members were present: John Wahl, Jerria Martin, Kasandra Stevens, Debra Windsor, and Amy Minton. Members absent: Ron Snider and Angelia Stokes. APLS staff members present: Jennifer Holman, Kelyn Ralya, Katie Bailey, Ryan Godfrey, Matt Sponsler, Pennie Broussard, and Vanessa Carr. Visitor attended: Ben Albritton, Office of the Attorney General.

**Approval of Agenda**

Chairman Wahl moved to adopt the Agenda as written. Ms. Martin made the motion to approve the Agenda. Mrs. Windsor seconded the motion. Members voting in favor by saying "aye" are as follows: John Wahl, Amy Minton, Kasandra Stevens, Debra Windsor, and Jerria Martin. No "nays". Motion passed by unanimous vote.

**Approval of the Minutes**

The Minutes of the March 20, 2025 meeting were presented to the Board for approval. Mrs. Minton made the motion to approve the Minutes as written. Ms. Martin seconded the motion. Members voting in favor by saying "aye" are as follows: Kasandra Stevens, Debra Windsor, John Wahl, Jerria Martin, and Amy Minton. No "nays". Motion passed by unanimous vote.

**Participation**

Mr. Wahl - Participants are broken down into three (3) groups. Each person has three (3) minutes to address the Board. It's very incredibly important to me that everyone speaks to the Board. I think that's been very clear as my tenure as Chairman. It's something I talk a lot about whether it's livestreaming the meetings, or putting the minutes online. Traditionally, this Board has limited how many people can address the Board and that was one of my commitments as Chair to make sure that anyone or everyone who wants to address this Board will have the opportunity no matter how long it takes. I hate any confusion or misrepresentation that may have taken place because I believe that's the commitment of all my fellow board members as well. We are committed to making sure we hear from anyone who wants to address the Board and make that a priority. I appreciate the Board and our guest speakers.

**Group 1**

**Craig Scott – Director - Gadsden-Etowah County Public Library; Past President - Alabama Library Association (ALLA)**

Last year, I extended an open invitation to every board member to visit your local library to come see the good, and know the great works in your districts. Libraries are not political playgrounds, they are not here to serve an agenda, they are here to serve all people. What a child reads is left up to the parents and guardians, not this Board, not politicians, and not outsiders. The role of this Board is not to serve as a traffic cop, waving some books through while sidelining others. Libraries followed the policies you insisted we adopt. Now it's time for you to respect the process you demanded and follow it. Let local libraries do their jobs, let parents decide what's best for their children and let libraries continue to serve every Alabamian, not just those who shout the loudest and push the hardest.

**Mr. Wahl** – I want to address something – normally I don't address every comment but I find some of your comments offensive. I have never made a book challenge; I did visit my library as well as many others. This Board stood up for local libraries for LSTA grants and we fought for them. I personally went to the state legislature and found year-end funding so local libraries would not have to risk losing federal grants. There was not a single thank you and to say that this Board does not stand up for those libraries and not fight for them is offensive.

### **Cheryl Corvo - Fairhope**

I'm here today for what this Board has done to my library. Our library has followed every policy put forth, including creating a parental card system in September 2024. Because they didn't cave to your demands to remove books that had been cleared and reviewed multiple times using APLS code, you punished them. That's not leadership – that is retaliation. You allowed certain residents to justify removing books from age-appropriate sections. That is shameful, biased, and unworthy of this Board. You never visited our library; you haven't listened to our whole community; proving you have only listened to the few who validated your ideology. You claim to welcome public input, but your actions have stated otherwise. This meeting was quietly moved and failed to ensure that all Board members are present; especially the one who has expressed concern about this issue. It looks like you deliberately silenced them and we see it. You need a reminder what a public library is, a place for everyone. The books you targeted are not sexually explicit or harmful to minors, not by state code. You are hiding behind the guise of protecting children - that is bad leadership. APLS' role is to support libraries and provide resources to ensure equal access, not to moralize or micromanage. That is up to each community. We have followed your policies, and are still not in compliance. You started with threats and defunding and you didn't want dialogue, you wanted control. If the Board read these books that you are so eager to remove from age-appropriate sections, you might understand why we are fighting for them.

### **Carrie Hill**

I'm not a librarian but I'm not here today to speak as one. In the past two years, debate has resulted in the removal of books from libraries who rely on and are afraid to lose funding from the state of Alabama or APLS. This Board must understand that removal of books is putting children in danger. As a result of speeches made in this room and actions taken by this Board, books like *Yes/No!* were removed from some libraries in our state. Rules from this Board are supposed to make exceptions for books about human anatomy. It makes people uncomfortable to see the word "penis" and "vulva" in a book. It is a blessing that age-appropriate books like this are on the shelves freely available to children. Anyone can choose to walk past it and tell their child "No". If the books aren't on the shelves, the kids who need them can't find them. Tiered library cards are no solution for this. Librarians are professionals; it is their job to be informed of the needs of communities; to evaluate content; and put books on the right shelves out of reach of the wrong readers. I urge you to trust librarians to do their jobs and to do them well. I personally thank God for the librarians who are standing up for kids by keeping books like these on the shelves even if it means losing their funding.

### **Dr. Caleb Whitehead – Physician – Fairhope**

I'm here as a lifelong Alabamian to express my extreme disappointment with the Board. In February of this year, Fairhope library was told by members of this Board that they were in compliance with APLS guidelines. One month later, after hearing from people about books, that funding was paused. Members of this Board spoke to the press and demonstrated their complete ignorance on what federal and state law says about sexually explicit materials. I am thrilled that you have led such sheltered lives that you found two or three sentences on sexual assault some of the most vulgar material you have ever encountered. Unfortunately, most children live in the real world: one in nine girls and one in twenty boys are/or will become victims of sexual abuse. Access to these books on sexual health, abuse, and drug trafficking can help these children and their parents protect themselves. Just move the books, we're told. Move the books out of the reach of the people who need them. In this state, children can marry at 16-years-old. Thanks to this Board, all across the state of Alabama, a married child can no longer access books in their libraries to learn about the horrors of sexual trafficking. Be proud of the harm you caused. It is disgusting, it is repugnant, it is deeply embarrassing.

### **Gustavo Donaihi - Fairhope**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I have read cover to cover all of the books that have been challenged in our library. At first, I was eager to point out that these books were not inappropriate and was confused why they were being challenged. Eventually, I did go through a few books that I thought were mis-shelved and I started to understand where the people who are challenging these books were coming from. However, after reading all of the challenged books, I can tell you that the majority are not inappropriate. I am asking you to read the books from cover to cover to see that some might be inappropriate, but most are not. Allow the local libraries to work on your behalf. Allow the already-established process to work. Six (6) books have already been removed at Fairhope, and the Board has agreed to revisit all of the other appeal books. We

deeply care about the community and hope we can find common ground. Offer our librarians and our neighbors grace and your support.

**Mr. Wahl** – Thank you. There is a difference between a challenged book and a book that is against state code. It is well-marked and I appreciate that common sense.

**Chris Warren – Director - Dothan-Houston County Library System; Chair - LSTA Advisory Council**

- I have three points I want to make today. As chair of the LSTA Advisory council I can attest to the positive impact of LSTA funds made available through competitive grants for public libraries across Alabama and especially small towns and rural communities. With the uncertainty of IMLS and LSTA, we appreciate the safety net included in the ETF budget. It's my hope that these funds will continue to be made available directly to libraries across the state and that the Advisory Council will continue to be involved on decisions on how these funds are invested.
- The January 20, 2025 Executive Order never mentions libraries. While it uses language prohibiting the use of federal funds to promote gender ideology, the inclusion of books or resources in a library collection is not the same as the promotion of a certain idea. Our collections are built to reflect diverse needs, interests, values with experiences and ways of life of the people that we serve.
- It is frustrating and demoralizing when I hear the phrase 'we listen to the people' to justify a capricious decision when the people are short for the people with whom we agree are the only people who matter. Public libraries don't serve majorities, but rather all of the people who call our community home. It is disheartening to claim that libraries and library professionals are disingenuous and unprofessional. We do our jobs to make informed, thoughtful, careful decisions of the policies, programs, resources, and services all removed from any one particular political agenda. I am proud of the fact that the local directors, trustees, and employees do their best to serve our entire communities as effectively as possible. To suggest otherwise diminishes the hard work we do every day. It is my hope that this Board will focus less on what you feel is wrong with local libraries and focus more energy on positive things that libraries do each and every day to support early literacy, lifelong learning, economic opportunity and quality of life.

**Samantha Webb – Former Educator**

Thank you for allowing me to speak today. As a citizen of this state and a former educator, what I have seen and read has concerned me greatly. First, I was upset to learn about the elimination of IMLS. I hope you will do everything you can to support its reinstatement. Secondly, I was disheartened to hear about the Fairhope Public Library without due diligence. I have been outraged about the mass challenges of books that have been conducted by Clean-up Alabama and Moms for Liberty. These organizations do not stand for parental rights, nor any other rights. I reject their claims that LGBTQ+ individuals are harmful to minors, books sexualize children, and advocates for the freedom to read are rumors. This is nonsense, clean and pure. The First Amendment protects everyone's rights, my right to read, your right to read, and vice versa. Public libraries are designed to serve the communities in which they are located without favor or disfavor. As members of the public, we have a choice on what to check out from libraries and parents have the responsibility to choose books for their children. Choice and responsibility are what parents' rights are in a democratic society. Please reject these efforts to marginalize and silence vital library constituents, and support local control by professional librarians.

**Ted H. Halley**

A few years ago, I did all I could to transition from male to female. I had facial surgeries and got rid of my male anatomy, etc. Yes, it was my decision and I am responsible for that. I am here to tell you that this ideology is very dangerous. If I didn't feel so, I wouldn't be here today and I wouldn't have re-transitioned to a male. All you're hearing from the other side is rah rah, glitter, glitter, yea, yea. It doesn't save lives. The thing perpetrators say are not dangerous are very dangerous. They are targeting the most vulnerable, the young, because it sticks with them the rest of their lives. There are groups called gays against groomers that speaks against this on social media and in libraries. There are groups that advocate the gay lifestyle, fighting against the transgender ideology. How crazy is that, people within the same umbrella are fighting against it. I'm telling you from personal experience, from talking to people, working with people and having experienced it myself, it's dangerous, it's irreversible, and people are scarred for life. If

**Ted H. Halley (continued)**

you take off the anatomy of a female, she can never breastfeed a child. If you take off the anatomy of a man trying to be a woman, he will never be a father. Board, I think you're doing a great job. Keep that material away from young minds that don't need it. They can get it other places. Thank you for your time and for all the great stuff you're doing.

**Dallas Baillio – Retired Director - Mobile Public Library**

There are a couple of things I want to address today. I was looking at the definition of censorship. It is the suppression or prohibition of any parts of books considered obscene and then it says politically unacceptable. I think that's what is happening here, it's politically unacceptable. If you say you're not censoring, you have set up a procedure where books for teens be moved to the adult section but teens might not have access to the adult section. I wanted to speak about Moms for Liberty and Clean-up Alabama. They are what you call dark money organizations. That means you don't know where their funding is coming from. What is undergirding their actions, that's dark money. It's used for political organizations that were established to fund money to campaigns without anyone knowing about it. I don't think we should call any book obscene. That is a legal definition and it has to be determined by a court. It's not obscene until a court determines it. That came from a Supreme Court decision in 1972. It says that a book must be taken as a whole and appeals to a prurient interest. Those two things need to be remembered also. This Board's definition of sexually explicit fits the definition of obscene because there are many things that a library wouldn't have, but you are using it as though it is something that a library might have. Any obscene items in a library will be immediately removed.

**Randall Wright – Chair of Trustees - Fairhope Public Library**

I'm grateful for this opportunity to share a couple of thoughts with you. Contrary to what you might have heard in the newspapers, we are not trying to defy the Alabama Public Library Service (APLS). We suggest that APLS create a written procedure notifying libraries that are not in compliance the opportunity to interact directly with the APLS Board before they threaten to defund the library. I would like to recall Mr. Wahl's response to a question he was asked at the April 17, 2025 meeting of the library directors: If one library has a book in the adult section and another library in a different town has the same book in the teen section, does that library have to relocate that book to the adult section? Mr. Wahl's response was "no". That city does not have to remove the book because community standards are different. I have witnessed the standards of the majority of the citizens of Fairhope who have spoken in support of our public library, and I believe that we adhere to the APLS guidelines while also listening to the community standards of Fairhope. In closing, thank you, Ms. Stevens, for visiting the Fairhope Public Library. I extend an invitation to this Board to come see our library in action. We've been voted the best place for kids to have fun, and I promise you'll enjoy your visit.

**Mr. Wahl** – Thank you. Regarding my comment, that is still my opinion; a good example of that is Spanish Fort Library. They may have something stricter than the APLS code and I don't expect other libraries to adhere to that same level. However, all libraries are required to follow the code. I'm saying because one library goes stricter, all public libraries will not be held to that stricter standard, as long as they are in compliance.

**Group 2****Robert Gourlay – Director - Fairhope Public Library**

Mr. Wahl, thank you for the phone call with me and others regarding the funding pause. Also, thank you, Ms. Stephens, for visiting on Monday. I think we can agree on the importance of our libraries and how vital they are to our communities. I hope you can see how much the community cares about the library by people travelling to this meeting. I think it's been mischaracterized a bit that Fairhope Public Library is not acting in good faith. We've had a lot of reconsideration forms submitted; there are approximately 20,000 card holders in Fairhope. Six or seven are responsible for the requests for reconsideration. I am not minimizing those individuals and their opinions. We have taken individual requests with respect, board of trustees, the staff, as well as myself wants to listen to each individual, no matter the size of the group. They are part of the community and deserve to be heard. Since January we have moved six (6) books from the juvenile section to the adult section. We are engaging in good faith toward that review process. At the April Meeting, the trustees voted to revisit fourteen (14) books that previously had decisions made prior to the Administrative Code changes. Board members are being responsive to requests from the community. I would ask if this Board does identify a book or multiple books

**Group 2****Robert Gourlay – Director - Fairhope Public Library (continued)**

that you feel are inappropriate, I ask for some kind of consistency. I saw many of the controversial titles in the teen sections throughout the state, and questioning why our funding was paused before any kind of judgment on the title was made across the state.

**Mr. Wahl** – I want to address this since we are talking about this situation. I want to thank you for your cordialness. I very much enjoyed talking with the leadership at Fairhope and I respect your due process, that's ongoing. I am not an adversary in any way, shape, or form. I very much understand the mischaracterization that can happen; I am also a victim of that. I want to continue the open dialogue between us and Fairhope. Some people try to paint it as the Board targeting Fairhope and using it as a lesson. I do want to use it as a lesson but as a lesson on how you can treat people with respect and come together and find a solution. I appreciate your dedication in working with us and we do understand the difference between a challenged book and a book that does not follow state code. We are graciously waiting for you guys to finish your review process and look forward to working with you after that point when you get there. The main reason Fairhope was targeted was the Board shut parents down and didn't give them the chance to review the books based on the new state code. They felt like there was no recourse except to come to the state board. You have corrected that and we look forward to working with you.

**Lindsay Gardner – Director - O'Neal Library – Mountain Brook**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. At the last meeting, questions were posed to the Board about due process notification and the appeals process for libraries whose compliance is in question. I urge you again to consider these questions and more questions.

- Will the full board officially endorse or adopt definitions for sexually explicit or inappropriate during an open meeting? Mr. Wahl spoke to library directors in April and during the Q&A said we will receive an e-mail with definitions in June. I want to clarify that we received an e-mail with specific library policies attached but no further direction. We were not told that those policies had been officially endorsed or adopted by the full APLS Board.
- Will the Board be more transparent in board meetings for making decisions about pulling library funding? In the last meeting, board members talked about moving books at Fairhope without mentioning specific titles or specific conditions of the code. How and when did you decide which titles should be moved? How and when did you decide which sections of the code were violated? If those decisions weren't made in an open meeting, I strongly urge you to be more transparent in future meetings.
- Will the Board consider asking speakers to provide context when making complaints about titles? Mr. Wahl told library directors that the Board would not consider complaints unless the local library had a chance to address those complaints first. Before speakers or APLS board members can make complaints about library compliance, I urge you to urge each speaker who filed a formal challenge with their local library board to add those questions to the form that must be submitted to speak at these meetings. Otherwise, how would you know which complaints meet the standard that the Board has set?
- Lastly, a couple of board members have spoken extensively to the press about library compliance with a cursory sentence about the overall goodness of libraries. Next time you give a statement, I urge you to add sentences about specific library services that you have enjoyed as a patron or that you have seen made a big impact on communities. I hope you will consider these questions. Thank you for your time.

**Mr. Wahl** – That last idea, I was probably the person you mentioned. The vast majority of libraries have tremendous assets to their communities. I understand and respect that and I will say to asking a person to complete an excerpt, I am making a commitment now, and I am speaking for the Board. If someone requests that a local library funding be cut, we will at that point dig into it and make sure it's actually a legitimate claim before we move forward. I have encouraged more people than you can imagine to get with their local library's director and board and been a peacemaker. Probably more than you will ever know. That is the role for every single board member.

**James Gilbreath – President - Alabama Library Association (ALLA)**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. As the new president of ALLA, it is my duty to speak on behalf of our membership and to advocate on behalf of libraries and librarians across the state. I'm an academic librarian, so I have had an outside perspective somewhat of the public library matters that have been going on for the past couple of years. Libraries serve all members of their communities. A certain member on this Board commented on a podcast about library materials, "if you don't want this in your public library, there is enough of you people out there in the community to object to it, then that should be the policy." It is very true that the local library boards can set their policies; APLS cannot dictate specifically across the state. With regard to sexually explicit materials definition, Nancy Pack, former director of APLS, distributed to public libraries the Ozark-Dale County Public Library policies for information purposes. She made it clear in the e-mail that it wasn't a requirement, it was for reference only. The same board member shared information with *1819 News* last August which states 'a constitutional republic is designed to save our individual liberties to prevent the tyranny from further infringing on the rights of each citizen'. Our system of government with its checks and balances is structured to protect the rights of all people, not just the majority. The Constitution with its Bill of Rights ensures that legal rights are beyond the majority rule; these rights are God-given and must be protected against government overreach. The APLS Board trying to dictate how local boards set their policies would be an example of government overreach in my opinion.

**Bessie Pringle – Sophomore - Mountain Brook High School**

Reading has always been such a blessing to me - not being able to walk and in a wheelchair, instead of my world getting smaller, it grew in great proportions. Books perform magic; I've learned to consider others perspectives that are not my own. My new experience has always been facilitated at my local library. All my times in the children's section, I have not one time seen a book that was considered sexually explicit, neither has my brother or sister; we are avid readers. I trust my librarians and my parents to determine which books I should read. I firmly believe the decision on which books are available should be left up to the librarians.

**Rebecca Watson – Fairhope (Handout – reconsideration book list given to Board)**

None of the books highlighted on this list have been relocated. There are several books placed into the adult sections in Baldwin County; however, Fairhope continues to keep the books in the teen section. This is important because we share books – it puts the other libraries in jeopardy of losing their funding even though they are following all the guidelines. I asked the Fairhope director if books were weeded in the minor collection that are in violation of the APLS policies and requested a list of the books. The response was he didn't have a list but stated they are continuously weeding their collection. I specifically asked if he had weeded their collection in compliance with the APLS and Fairhope written policies. I haven't received a response to that. It is my understanding that librarians are to weed the collection to locate books that are in violation; not to rely on patrons to bring reconsiderations to their attention then weed the collection.

**Jason Baker – Director - Trussville Public Library**

Thank you for your time. Positive stories happen every day in Alabama libraries. [Mr. Baker shared a story of a boy and his grandfather coming to the library.] The experience by youth services staff and patrons illustrate all five laws of library science articulated by rank: books are for use; every person is his/her book; every book its reader; save the time of the reader; and the library is a growing organism. This is just one story among many you can collect from across the state that illustrates what we do in libraries. You have to take the time to look, be genuine, courteous, and engage.

**Alyx-Kim-Yohn**

Public librarianship is a profession – it's a career in which one develops skills and commits to a code of ethics. This code includes a commitment to provide equitable, accurate, and unbiased services to all patrons; to uphold the principles of intellectual freedoms and to resist censorship; to refuse to advance private interests at the expense of our patrons, communities or colleagues; to distinguish between personal convictions and professional duties; and to keep our personal beliefs out of our work; to affirm and uphold the inherent dignity, humanity, and rights of every person. This Board purports to believe in the mission of public libraries but clearly distrusts those of us who have dedicated our lives to understanding and living this profession. As far as I can tell, not a single person who has spoken in favor of the recent changes, including last year's



**Alyx-Kim-Yohn (continued)**

Admin. Code changes, defunding Fairhope Public Library, firing Dr. Pack, or finding materials on or off the shelves, is currently employed at a public library. This Board has forsaken its commitment to the public in favor of your patrons, a group of local minorities to privatize public libraries. This Board, the Governor and some of our legislators have carved into us the rhetoric that explicitly decided these proceedings. There is no need to entertain advising public libraries about Executive Order 14168. The Order doesn't proscribe how anyone of any sex is supposed to dress, talk, or behave. In fact, it refuses the validity of gender identity entirely, which means anyone can wear or do whatever they want as long as they are honest about their genitals on government records. Despite the multiple accusations thrown at me and my colleagues even in this very room, I don't actually care to know anything about my patrons' genitals of any age when I'm helping them to find a book, or even directing them to the restroom. It's none of my business and neither is it yours. No one community should be up for debate, and certainly not here where the role of this Board is to ascertain and help keep public library doors open. Keep an eye on the rural communities that are still waiting for reliable affordable broadband access and are depending on their libraries as they will be the hardest hit if IMLS folds. Be thankful that the American Library Association (ALA) has decided to step away from its historically non-partisan stance to fight for the IMLS and for all of our libraries and museums. Certainly, more than I've seen done here.

**Mr. Wahl** – I am not sure you are aware of this, but I appreciate you recognizing the American Library Association securing the grants. Are you aware that those grants, even if we lose in the federal level, I have been able to secure guaranteed state funding for public libraries?

**Alyx-Kim-Yohn** - I know at the last meeting there was discussion of funding through the end of this fiscal year.

**Mr. Wahl** – I was able to extend funding until the next fiscal year even if we lose federal funding, so there is a safety net in place. I want you to know because I'm hearing more and more that this Board doesn't care about the grants and doesn't care about our libraries. I don't know where this rhetoric is coming from and it's very false. We are 100% behind our libraries and I worked very hard to get that safety net. Even if we lose the federal grant, our libraries can prepare and be ready. I just wanted you to know because somehow the press is much more likely to report on the negative and not the encouragement of helping each other. I wanted you to know because it didn't get reported as I think it should have. If it was the opposite and I was trying to pull library money, it would have been front page news, but good work isn't reported and that's a shame. It's the entire Board's heart, so just know that. The budget was amended several weeks ago. Thank you for coming and it's always good to see you.

**Susan Stewart – Huntsville**

The extremist movement is trying to erase and terrorize the LGBTQ+ citizens uses children as weapons and libraries as battlegrounds. At library board meetings and legislative hearings, I have been subjected to horrific lies and misrepresentations about the lives and experiences of transgender people including stories of medical atrocities that have nothing to do with transgender people. Stories from the extremely small number of de-transitioners does not justify withholding information and medical care for the much greater number of people who need it. Sixty-seven (67) percent of people who transition have no regrets and actually have positive feeling about the gender affirming care of surgical procedures. Less than 1% of people regret gender affirming surgery, and of that number, about half regretted surgery due to societal pressures or surgical complications, not because they were misdiagnosed, pressured, or recruited. As medical care and psychological screenings improve, those already tiny numbers are trickling down. Compare this to 20% of people who regret knee replacement surgery or weight loss surgery or the 25% who regret heart surgery. In case you're thinking about citing the anonymous 400-page health and human services report on gender affirming care for children, the President of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) wrote that the organization is deeply alarmed by the new document. This report misrepresents current medical consensus and fails to reflect the realities of pediatric care. The report was not credible because it relied on selected perspective and narrow set of data. AAP was not consulted on the report but its recommendations were inaccurately characterized throughout. The official AAP recommendations state that transgender youth should access comprehensive gender affirming and developmentally appropriate health care. People in power get more power at the expense of our economy, our environment,

**Susan Stewart – Huntsville (continued)**

our culture, our education and even our democracy, which means attacking libraries and risking the well-being of children to wage a culture war against transgender people even more.

**Margaret Pittenger - Physical Therapist**

I grew up two blocks from our public library. It's been a big part of my life. Librarians are very well aware of what we look at. I have lived in ten (10) states and always find a library in the local area because I need information about the people I will be working with. Knowing about their history is important to me. I came today because I was mostly concerned about librarians being threatened and possibly sent to jail for doing their job. It is nice to hear all of the different viewpoints and to know that is not going to happen. If you have a problem, it needs to be worked out with the local library, and not at the state or government level.

**Mandy Broadhurst - Director - Guntersville Public Library; Adjunct Instructor - University of Alabama School of Library and Information Studies**

I teach a library management course to graduate students obtaining their Master's Degree in Library Science. I teach professional standards, best practices, and ethics of librarianship, the same standards that have been taught to librarians for the last century. There are legal definitions to terms like obscenity and harm to minors where federal courts say you must look at the work as a whole. Yet, you contradict that by telling us we are to judge a work by its worst part. You also tell us that moving books is not censorship, but I teach my students that it is. According to our professional standards and federal courts, moving a book to a less accessible location is a form of censorship especially if it's done to limit access to certain ideas or viewpoints. You keep saying things that are your opinion, but they are not educated expert opinions. I don't tell this Board how to do your 9-5 jobs, but here we are. Everything you're saying about materials in public libraries being harmful to children are based on this hypothetical possibility of children being harmed by books. Most of these books have been on public library shelves for years. Wouldn't we have so many instances of children being harmed by books by now, but no, that's not the case because access to books have harmed no one. Lots of professions, doctors, for instance, are governed by boards that guide them based on professional standards in that field, but not personal opinions and political meetings. That's what this Board has done. The people who get up here and say we have disgusting, sick things in our libraries, who call us groomers, are counting on you to prioritize their opinion because it aligns with yours. That is not what this Board is meant to do. Based on your words and actions after these meetings, you are really only listening to those people when you speak about us, when you speak about libraries and librarians to political organizations to the media, you do so from the perspective of politicians, not that of the chair of a bipartisan professional organization. Everything you say states you don't support libraries the way they are designed to be, but the way you want them to be, based on your personal opinion. Yet, you are serving on the Board, an organization full of educated librarians: Kelyn, Katie, Ken, Alisa, Rhonda, Stephanie, Alex, just to name a few in this building. Their knowledge and experience are at your disposal. You don't want to consult with these experts to decide how our libraries should be run because if you did, and they were able to have a frank and honest discussion with you, they would tell you the same thing I have today. These decisions and rules you've made up are completely against best practices and all professional library ethics. Please listen to librarians, please let us do our jobs. You are diminishing our work and undermining our purpose.

**Mr. Wahl** – It's important to remember that this Board does not represent librarians. This Board represents the people of the state. In the end, the individuals are where our priority lies.

**Ms. Broadhurst** – But you are still telling experts in the field how to do their jobs.

**Mr. Wahl** – The vast majority of libraries are doing a tremendous job.

**Ms. Broadhurst** – The ones with controversy are doing a tremendous job, too.

**Mr. Wahl** - We are working with them.



### Group 3

#### **Angie Hayden – Co-founder – Read Freely Alabama**

As I was watching in the overflow room as a concerned speaker was chastised for not thanking the Chairman, I could not help but think that maybe it's time to stop pretending this Board, under current leadership, is not hostile to Alabama libraries. I stand before a Board with a member who shared on social media that librarians are "the most toxic profession in America", and challenged thirty plus books in her library, and threatened library funding, if they would not remove *Go Johnny Go*, a story about a little boy who wants to be a cheerleader and only called it a "misunderstanding" when it became a public embarrassment. A Board whose Chair regularly appears on the podcast of a man who repeatedly calls for the burning of books and continues to be friendly and supportive of that podcaster. A Board whose members openly collude and celebrate with Moms for Liberty, who is an official Project 2025 coalition partner. A Board whose Chair has tried desperately to twist legal code that applies to actual child sexual abuse conduct and pornography, to sex education books and stories for teens about surviving assault. A Board whose Chair says it's his duty to make Moms for Liberty members 'comfortable' at the expense of other taxpaying citizens disregarding First and Fourteenth Amendment rights. A Board who approved Fairhope Public Library's policies only to stop their funding after a member of Moms for Liberty traveled to Montgomery with her own personal agenda. Read Freely has been calling the intentional misrepresentation and attacks on libraries for two years now, and it has only since escalated. Now, we have Alabama libraries like Spanish Fort moving books about little girls with two mommies to restrict 18 plus sections for adults only. We have North Shelby Library moving books for girls about puberty and their menstrual cycle to restricted sections and librarians are not even allowed to recommend them. The notion that this is all to protect children is a farce. Minors will be the ones to suffer for it as these are the type of materials that actually make them safer from predators. Please let's stop pretending this Board under its current leadership is not hostile to Alabama's libraries, the Constitution and individual rights for everyone, not just a few. Let's stop this unnecessary and unconstitutional assault on libraries and all families to the rights of equal access to information.

#### **Darla Williamson – Patron – Hoover Public Library**

I came because of what I am hearing about the librarians and libraries in particular. The libraries are a comfortable place for communities. When I move to a new town, I go to the library, meet people, and check out books. Libraries are different now and they have done a great job of keeping up with the times and needs of their communities. Walk through a library today and you will see kids of all ages, including college students doing homework, parents getting together with their kids, and kids meeting up. I have been fortunate to teach art classes at the Vestavia library. Libraries are such an important place for community, for children, as well as adults. I think we forget as we go through changes in life, when people are looking for community, the library fills the void. It's important when talking about cutting funding for books. I don't agree with censoring books and people complaining about a few books, but pulling funding from a huge community resource that is meeting more than just checking out books. I ask that you keep in mind that these communities are so much more for people who just read books.

**Mr. Wahl** – Thank you and appreciate your genuineness. The difference with Fairhope is the parents did not have the chance to ask for review and that left no choice for the parents but to come to this Board. We want to keep it on the local level as much as possible.

#### **Dr. Marisa Allison – Friends of Huntsville-Madison County Public Library**

We are defenders of the library, the working class, LGBTQ+ class, and communities across our state, that are being impacted by the attacks you are waging on our libraries. Today I want to talk to you about the cost of these attacks, fiscally and ethically, which are numerous and ongoing. In December 2018, this Executive Board submitted a set of changes to the Administrative Code of Alabama that has caused significant harm and costs to communities across the state. Interestingly, on that submission form that APLS submitted it asked does the proposed rule have an economic impact, to which APLS answered "No". It goes on to say if the proposed rule has an economic impact, it is required to be accompanied by a fiscal note, no such note was included, so taxpayers of the state have footed the bill of these unfunded and unethical mandates that they did not want. The Huntsville-Madison County System introduced a three-tier library card system for minors to comply with the code changes and of the 10,570 total minor cards of the system, only 5% of the families across the county purportedly selected to place their child into the lower tiers of access. We have said from the beginning that the book banners are a local minority, that is the case here, and the case across the state. How much do you wonder all these supposedly no tax

**Dr. Marisa Allison – Friends of Huntsville-Madison County Public Library (continued)**

changes costs taxpayers in Madison County? Nearly \$60,000 thus far, just to put these policies in place. Our library staff did not receive a cost-of-living wage increase last year; there are real harmful impacts being raised on these workers in our community. Now, it looks like, according to this agenda, that you are going to move forward with sending a letter to all our libraries advising them that they will need to remove all transgender related materials, making it official state policy to discriminate against transgender people and ban these books. A look through our library catalog shows this will be a massive undertaking for libraries. It is clear that you, though not a governing body, are willing to not only hold funding hostage from our libraries, but not fund libraries to do your bidding to comply with these changes. Exactly how much will this cost taxpayers? I am certain it will be more than this body gives to our library system. If the Admin. Code changes cost our library nearly \$60K just for the review of 12,000 items, what will it cost for the 1.5 million items that Huntsville has in its collection? This is transphobic unfunded blackmail you will issue if you allow this letter to be sent out. It will cost our libraries and communities.

**Erica Foster – Huntsville**

I am a student working towards becoming a certified sexuality educator. I am trying to be a subject matter expert on exactly what is healthy sexuality at any given age. Many of the literature challenged at Fairhope is literature that can save a child's life. These are conversations that parents, pediatricians, and educators have with children every day. We owe it to children to make sure they have access to these materials to prevent tragedy, to prevent trauma, before needed medical procedures, and to help heal the tragedy that has already struck. Every book I have been able to review on the list is the same. They have been determined to be appropriate for the ages listed by educated subject matter experts. Per the decision of *Sund vs. City of Wichita Falls, Texas*, moving books out of the reach of the young people they are intended for causes "irrevocable emotional harm to children and irreparable injury to their constitutional rights". Per the judge, a parent who wants to prevent their child's access to the materials, should not prevent all children in the community from gaining access to constitutionally protected materials. We need to trust the experts and support our libraries and everyone who works in them.

**Aaron de Jager**

When I was in middle school, I volunteered at my library for several Summers. I love reading; I love that books can be used to transport you to another world along with the artists to your mind. I love libraries, I love the atmosphere to be separated from the rest of the world. I found data that shows trans kill themselves because they think the way they feel is wrong or evil. The explicit content mentioned is educational materials safe for children. These are children's books you want to ban. No publisher would publish a children's book containing this nebulous explicit content. It wouldn't sell. Books you want to ban do not exist; it is an excuse to defund libraries and remove an ongoing culture. You know this, I know this, give people respect, don't lie to us trying to take our public good away. Don't use my friends as scapegoats for more political power. If you actually care about protecting children from molestation, you should keep boys from priests. Keep my childhood sanctuary, the common quiet place.

**Dr. Paige Tallulah Gant – Patron - Huntsville-Madison County Public Library**

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak today. If you Google Nazi book burning and click on the images section, you will see an iconic black-and-white photo of a crowd of people around a pile of burning books in the Bebelplatz square in Berlin on May 10, 1933. This burning came after the Nazis looted the Institute of Sex Research, an institution which pioneered modern transgender health care such as hormone replacement therapy and gender reassignment surgery. Many of the burning books were about research into transgender health care and transgender identity. The Nazis would have agreed with organizations like Moms for Liberty and Clean-up Alabama. The Nazis wholeheartedly agreed that books about LGBTQ+ topics are inappropriate for children. The Nazis would agree that books about gay and transgender people should be removed from libraries. Once the Nazis did this, they sent people off to concentration camps and slaughtered them in masses. I am here today because I see history repeating itself. I see trans people being demonized, and I am afraid for myself and my community. I urge this library board to heed the lesson of history and resist any calls to remove LGBTQ+ books from libraries.

**Sarah Sanchez – Volunteer - Clean-up Alabama and Autauga-Prattville Public Library**

Board, thank you for the codes put in place to protect our children. We are not creating books for the collection that market to children inappropriate content precisely spelled out in the code. Books are moved to the appropriate area in the library and should not be available to children under 18 years of age. We are providing the library card system that provide cards for minors and adults. We appreciate that. Listening to comments today, there is a lot of passion and bitterness. I don't share that bitterness on my part, on my stance of the issue. When we want to do something, we will do it; when we want to understand something, we will understand it; when we want to protect something, we will protect it; when we want to listen, we will listen. There is a lack of will among many parties to understand what's going on, to understand what inappropriate means, and to understand what obscenity means. I appreciate any effort from the Board to clarify these terms to help people understand. There are some books that can be a margin of disagreement, is it appropriate or not appropriate. The codes are there for the books that we obviously know that minors should not have unrestricted access to. Our funds from taxpayers should not be used to purchase these books. That's the problem. Before these codes, we came to the local libraries and they told us "no". The ALA advised us everybody has the right to access whatever they want at any age and you need to trust your librarians. We all have different values and that's why we need to spell out some of these standards.

**Matthew Layne – Former President of the Alabama Library Association (ALLA) and a proud member of the American Library Association**

Good afternoon, friends, Chairman Wahl, and members of the APLS Executive Board. I have been serving in Alabama's public libraries since 2005. I received my Master's in Library and Information Studies from the University of Alabama in 2010. I've been wrestling to find the right words to move you today. I don't have much hope. I have watched in dismay as the Executive Board governing this agency has become more politicized. So many Board members seem more focused on creating a political spectacle rather than carrying out the simple objective clearly stated in the Alabama Administrative Code of APLS: *"The Alabama Public Library Service, created by the Code of Alabama 1975, has as its chief objective the development of a cooperative system providing books and library services to various municipalities and counties of the state."* There's nothing in there about forcing one's personal political agenda upon Alabama's public libraries. As librarians, we purposely leave our personal politics at the door when we arrive at work. And you, as Executive Board members, would do well to follow in our example. We should not be aware of your personal biases. Your board members should not post information about APLS on extremist social media pages across our great state. It's sad and it's wrong. Chairman Wahl, I beg of you to demand some decorum from the APLS Executive Board members. In each Alabama public library, there is a process in place for the reconsideration of materials at that library. It's called a reconsideration policy because the materials on the shelves have already been considered by professional librarians to ensure that it adheres to the standards set forth in that library's collection development policy. Reconsideration of materials should be left in the hands of the staff and the board of trustees of the libraries they serve. Nothing in the Administrative Code grants APLS the power or even the purview to consider or reconsider the materials on the shelves of Alabama public libraries. You were appointed to this Board to do a simple task, the development of a cooperative system of providing books and library services to the citizens of Alabama. Stop playing politics. Do the task you were appointed to do, to serve all of the citizens of Alabama. God bless the librarians and all those we serve.

**Elizabeth Williams – Former Teacher – Librarian – Fairhope (3 handouts – letter and postcards)**

I am here to speak in defense of our wonderful public library. Our library has been unfairly and unjustly targeted. I performed an in-depth analysis of several of books issued, visited dozens of on-line catalogs, and discovered that Fairhope's cataloging practices are in line with 83% of Alabama's public libraries that showed the titles in the teen and young adult sections. Yet, we are the only one to have our state funding paused. Why? Because a very small group of politically motivated individuals did not like the fact that our library board did its job with integrity and did not side with their challenges. Our board reviewed challenged books, followed APLS guidelines and state laws, and determined once again, that these titles belonged in the teen section, not the children's section, not the adult section, but the teen section where they can best reach their intended and appropriate audience. The point is our local library board has followed every applicable law, policy, and procedure. What they have not done, and what they are under no ethical obligation to do, is cave to pressure from extremist groups who want to control how our libraries operate and micromanage collection development and cataloging. The APLS Board

**Elizabeth Williams – Former Teacher – Librarian – Fairhope (3 handouts – letter and postcards) (continued)**

does not have the authority to dictate the placement of individual titles. Your role is to provide training and resources to set statewide rules for funding eligibility and let the local boards govern. That's the system, and Fairhope has followed it, to the letter. This is not about putting sexually explicit materials in front of children, no one wants that. This is about allowing teens to access age-appropriate young adult literature, books that win awards, educate, and protect. Particularly, against the claim the very dangers these critics claim to oppose abuse from exploitation. When government begins dictating which books are appropriate based on standards and political pressure, that's not protecting children, that's censorship. You say you believe in the Constitution, individual liberties and personal responsibilities, then let's live those values. If a parent doesn't want their child reading a certain book, that's their right to make that decision for their child, but they don't override the professional judgment of trained librarians. If we moved every book that made a parent uncomfortable, the adult section would be full of *Captain Underpants*. That's not how libraries work, that's not how America works.

**Group 4**

**Maggie Minsk - did not attend**

**John Pollock - Lawyer**

Members of the Board, the lawyer part of me wants to get into the First Amendment issues this Board is raising by approving books for obscene and legal sense, but I am not here as a lawyer today, but as a parent of a nine-year-old. We go to the library twice a month and I don't have a problem with my son reading books to help him understand who he is, who other people are, or the world around him. I don't want him to feel stigmatized by trying to learn or educate himself, and that's the key. The materials in libraries are aimed at educating and there is nothing in the library that can harm our children so much that it's appropriate for the state to take that decision away from me or any other parent to let our children find what they need. We can be there to monitor them if we think there need be. A former speaker suggested that we trust librarians, actually, I trust myself as a parent. On the subject of harm to children, I need to address the issue raised by a prior speaker that some of these books might lead to child suicide. I volunteer over 200 hours for a crisis service and many of the teens I talk to that are suicidal had been denied recognition of their identities, and that was driving them to want to end their lives. They were desperate for understanding, and denying them a chance to learn and understand could not help them. Finally, if we are really concerned about the welfare of children, let's focus on what we face right now, let's all go together right now and protest the funding cuts to Head Start, to Medicaid, children health insurance programs, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Housing and Urban Development, child tax credits, and temporary assistance for needy families. That is the real and serious harm our children face right now.

**Wendy Pickering**

I am here today to address the open defiance shown by Fairhope Public Library, the Mayor of Fairhope, and the City Council regarding your clearly stated compliance requirements. This Board gave them a path toward continued funding and policies outlined based on protecting minors from obscene and sexually explicit material. Yet, instead of complying, they have dug in their heels and made it clear that they do not intend to cooperate. They've had over a year and a half to address concerns raised by citizens, instead they deny there's a problem, mock the concerns of parents, and publicly declare they don't know what the legal definition of obscene or sexually explicit is. I personally stood in front of the council and read excerpts from books. The contents were so graphic that a council member interrupted my grandson from continuing to read. If it is so inappropriate that it cannot be read in a council meeting, then how is it appropriate for a minor in a public library? Because of this ongoing defiance, we have escalated our responses. We have filed a complaint with the Attorney General requesting an investigation into the misuse of public funds to distribute obscene materials to minors. We filed with the Alabama Ethics Commission for potential violation of public trust, and we are filing claims against individual surety bonds of Fairhope Council and Mayor for violating their sworn duty to uphold the law and protect the public interests. I do realize that we are outnumbered when it comes to attending these meetings. Most of us work and we take a lot of time away. I have personally been attacked saying I am as "ignorant as the black folks coming out of Selma" which has one of the best and biggest libraries. Some of our cars have been keyed after city council meetings; I have personally been threatened that I would have my tail kicked for coming to this meeting today. We still come and we still fight because we are about the kids. Some of the books

**Wendy Pickering (continued)**

being sent in are by Read Freely groups to make us look like we are idiots and extremist. All groups have extremists, I admit that, but we are not. We are asking for graphic books be put in the adult section.

**Melanie Kolowski – Limestone County**

I have been a resident of Limestone County for 15 years and have attended library board meetings for over a year in Huntsville and Limestone. The interactions with librarians and library boards have been wonderful. The only inappropriate and negative interactions I have had has been with Moms for Liberty, and it's been quite extensive. In the course of a year, I have had my car blocked and I was recorded and then Security called on me for the person blocking my car, but I was able to document it. E-mails have been sent to board members. Moms for Liberty have chased people in our meetings and there is video of this. A librarian was pinned to the door and that resulted in a police report in October (see *Decatur Daily*). The librarian quit because of that interaction. In July of last year, I purchased this book, *Red*. The book is about dyslexia. As you can see, it's a blue crayon with a red label. The book appeared on the Clean-up Alabama and Moms for Liberty lists. There's nothing wrong with the book. It's inappropriate for anyone to try to manipulate things like that. In August, members of Moms for Liberty said the book can be used for gender. You can pervert anything if you want to. I respect Moms for Liberty's rights to parent their children absolutely how they want to. I know my politics are much different. I attend the meetings for the ones who don't know what's happening and to support everybody's rights. We're in a free country and you can make your own choices.

**Chairman's Report**

Thanks to Vanessa Carr for your work – I know it's a lot of work communicating with everyone, and getting things lined up. You do a tremendous job on that and I really appreciate your work. I know there was some confusion about the date change for the meeting today. I know there was a last-minute change; although, it was a couple of weeks in advance. Originally, I thought this was going to be the last week of the legislative session and I wanted the Board to have a chance after the Board Meeting to go to the State House and talk with the legislature and have a tour of the State House. Unfortunately, they changed their schedule and held over the last day of session. Instead of today, it will be next Wednesday, so that didn't work out. That was the reason for the change. The day after I made that decision, Vanessa got an e-mail out to the entire Board about the packets; if there was any confusion or frustration, it was on my end, not hers. I appreciate all the work you've done.

Listening to the public comments, ironically, I think we have a lot more in common than some would want us to believe. I believe strongly in First Amendment rights. I believe strongly in the right to read, and in parental rights that every parent should decide what their children have access to. The concept that parents shouldn't be engaged in that process is very ingenuous or that librarians know better what children should read than their parents, is a dangerous concept. That's actually what undermines the American system, a democracy and constitutional rights. Parents should be at the forefront of this and I think there are a lot of parents on both sides of this issue across the state. Neither side should try to use the power of government to enforce their own agenda on the general public. I hope that everyone would agree with the statements I just made. I think they are common sense and I want us to come together and try to agree. There is a lot of confusion, and a lot of this is driven by those who want to create misinformation which creates division within us. The important thing is that we as a Board communicate firmly what we believe, and how we represent our districts.

Going back to the confusion, the APLS code changes, especially for the board members here who were a part of that, were carefully thought out as a way not to limit information for anyone, but to listen to both sides and genuinely allow parents who were concerned about their children stumbling across sexually explicit materials wouldn't have to worry about that in Alabama libraries. While at the same time, safeguarding the rights of anyone who wanted that content for their children to still have access to that material in the adult section. We're not talking about censorship; we're not talking about book banning; and quite frankly, for anyone to insinuate that we condone book burning is incredibly offensive. Especially, someone who has stood up so strongly for the First Amendment, for stopping censorship, and limiting speech. I want to come together and highlight those facts so we can find a consensus. There are two opinions: I don't want to say either side is wrong. What I want to say is let's find common sense solutions that allow people to have the safeguards they deserve. That's what the APLS code does and there are

### **Chairman's Report (continued)**

those who don't want to listen to that. It's incredibly ingenuous to think that this Board has not stood up for local libraries.

This Board has stood up for local libraries, with the grant situation back in the Fall, when we reversed that decision to listen to our local libraries. We are the only state in the entire country who has a guaranteed funding safety net in place in case we lose federal grants. Yet, somehow there are those who would twist the facts and say that this Board does not support public libraries. I think that's sad because they should recognize the work that's being done. If you look for the bad in someone, you will find it and if you look for the good in someone, you will find it. I want to be someone who encourages looking for the good. As I have said on many occasions, there are so many amazing libraries in the state of Alabama and amazing librarians. You will never hear me attack individual people in any way, shape, or form. Someone may be different from me and have a different opinion from me, but I respect that difference, and I respect their right to have a difference of opinion.

Following state code is easy and simple. If libraries are worried about defunding, there is a simple solution, it's in your hands. It's not us that's defunding you; it's your choice to intentionally disobey state code, that's the only thing that will cause defunding. I encourage you strongly, any library director, look at the state code, comply with it, and there is nothing to worry about. If you are genuinely seeking to get to that point, you have nothing to worry about from this Board. We genuinely want to work with every single library in the state of Alabama. That is our commitment, but at the same time, we cannot ignore the voices of the people of Alabama, our constituents, in complying with requirements. It is our duty to enforce the code as it stands.

One of the complaints I heard regarding several topics:

#### **1. Books in the libraries contain information that is needed to prevent and educate about sexual assaults.**

I agree wholeheartedly – this is the key: There are books that can educate children on the dangers of sexual abuse that do not contain sexually explicit content. It can be done and it should be done. It doesn't seem that complicated – the books do not have to contain sexually explicit content in order to educate our children. We can find a common ground.

#### **2. Sexually explicit materials.**

Sex in general is a very delicate topic and there are going to be parents with very different opinions on all sides of the issue. We need to respect those parents. We need to allow them to be in the driver's seat, not un-elected library board members around this table, or un-elected library board members at the city or county level. Parents and taxpayers should be in the driver's seat, not un-elected bureaucrats who are paid by the taxpayers.

Another issue has come up and I am going to ask for a motion - sexually explicit has not been defined. That is an ambiguous term and different people may have different definitions or opinions on what that is. State code is very clear. There are three (3) requirements to comply:

- Obscenity – books would not have to contain obscenity – we understand that definition
- Sexually explicit – there are definitions - they are not as concise
- Other materials deemed inappropriate for children – that may include things as excessive violence, excessive drug use, things that are inappropriate for children that society recognizes on a daily basis.

This is important to highlight. I heard today that Fairhope has already moved some books; other libraries have moved books. By definition, you just admitted that there are materials that are inappropriate; there are things that should not necessarily be in front of children without their parents' consent. The admission is there; the only question is where is that line drawn. I think it is very disingenuous for those to say that in one breath blame this Board for restricting access to children, while in the next breath you are saying we have moved books. You have already admitted that there is a standard; that's an important admission because we already know that it exists. That's why we have R-rated movies; we rate music and video games; we don't allow children to buy drugs and alcohol. We protect our children. It's what we do as a society, we have always done it and to say that this is some kind of new agenda from this Board is ridiculous. We know as a society it has always been done and will be done because we love our children. When I read some of the excerpts from these books, and I challenge the press to print this: if you really



### **Chairman's Report (continued)**

want the public to know, print the materials. I tell you right now the TV stations can't play it and newspapers can't print it because they will be in violation of federal law. That's the thing. I challenge them, look at the material, print the material and let the public decide, because the public would be on the side of keeping this out of direct access of children in Alabama.

Local libraries have asked for definitions. This memo will be sent out and this is roughly based on state law and federal code, but it sets a clear definition from the APLS Board. If libraries have questions about what sexually explicit is, this is an easy definition that we can pass today and send to local libraries and they can know what sexually explicit is when it comes to the state code. (Memorandum was given to Board members to review and discuss.) Mrs. Minton made the motion that the definitions are passed concerning sexually explicit and that it be posted on the website and sent to every library. Ms. Martin seconded the motion. Members voting in favor by saying "aye" are as follows: Debra Windsor, John Wahl, Kasandra Stevens, Jerria Martin, and Amy Minton. No "nays". Motion passed by unanimous decision.

### **Further Discussion on sexually explicit**

Mrs. Minton – I checked out this book, *Gender Queer*, and it was for 13-year-olds. It tells about masturbation. Someone decided it deserves an award because the book as a whole is helpful. According to these definitions, they don't have to read the whole book. If they see it talks about masturbation, it should be on this list of sexually explicit books. Based on these definitions, it needs to be moved to the adult section. I just wanted to clarify that.

Chairman Wahl – I think this information will provide better guidance. This Board can do a better job especially with library directors, if they have requests like this, and don't understand, we can give them guidance. There has been a lot of talking to the press about who disagrees with this or with that, we can spell it out; this doesn't stop here. If they need us to spell something out, we will spell it out. That's something we should take very seriously to make sure they have the clear guidance they need. If they request it, we will do it.

Mrs. Minton – So, let me clear this up – will they have to file a reconsideration form if someone found this book, *Gender Queer*, can they take it to the library director and say, this is on this list and needs to be moved to the adult section. The library director should be able to move the book based on the Code of Alabama, instead of going through a Board, or complete a form.

Mr. Wahl – Every local library is going to have its own process. I would assume that would be the normal procedure, the library director then the board. If the director doesn't move the book, then proceed to the board.

Mrs. Minton – If you find a book that contains one or more of these words outlined in the definition, would that book need to be removed and deemed sexually explicit.

Mr. Wahl – There are several exemptions – biology books are exempted; religious books are exempted. I love debate and I love to hear all sides, but I take things more seriously today because my heart has been heavy. I feel like there is a lot of injustice and a lot of twisting of the truth in an attempt to divide people and create more controversy instead of coming together. At the end of the day, people on all sides of this debate whether they are Read Freely Alabama, Moms for Liberty, Clean-up Alabama, members of this Board, library staff and directors should have the same goal: helping Alabama libraries be a better place for our constituents. If that's our goal, the only debate is how we should be able to be cordial, respectful, have open-honest discussions on how we get to that point. I believe the code changes accomplished that. It is designed so those who want their children to have access to it, they can have access to it; but at the same time, we don't forget about parents who are concerned and don't feel comfortable with their children browsing through the children's section without risking seeing something sexually explicit. That is a concern of this Board because we represent the people, and we listen to our constituents. It's heartbreaking for me to hear the comments people are speaking who don't understand the heart of this Board. They don't understand that we do care about all people. Our goal is to serve the public the best way we can, put people first, and not bureaucracy.

**Letter to State Personnel and Finance Department Appointing Kelyn Ralya as Interim Director and Katie Bailey as Assistant Director**

The Board congratulated Kelyn Ralya as Interim Director of APLS and Katie Bailey as Assistant Director of APLS. A letter was sent to State Personnel and to the Finance Department appointing them. Chairman Wahl thanked both for their service to APLS and the state of Alabama.

**Unfinished Business**

**State Aid Compliance or Non-Compliance – Ben Albritton**

The question was asked whether a library that's in compliance with state aid and approved to receive an LSTA grant but fails to maintain compliance, what happens? It's a very vague question with a lot of contingencies and there is no clear answer. Generally speaking, once it's awarded, you don't take it away. It might affect awarding the next time it comes up, but they were in compliance when they were awarded the grant so they should be able to keep the grant.

Mr. Wahl – I agree with that. Once awarded, it's approved at that point.

**LSTA Update – IMLS – Kelyn Ralya**

I am happy to report that IMLS did issue APLS' partial payment for 2025 which gets us through September 30, 2026. We are still hopeful that we will receive the other portion. We received a partial allotment of approximately \$1.4 million and were able to let the FY2025 LSTA grantee libraries that they could go forward with spending their grant funds. In March, 2025, an Executive Order was issued to dissolve seven (7) federal agencies including IMLS. Several lawsuits were filed and a decision was recently made in the *Rhode Island v. Trump* lawsuit. The judge issued an injunction to halt the dismantling of these agencies. Previously, IMLS had seventy-seven (77) staff members; now they are down to twelve (12). We haven't heard anything different from IMLS since the judgment came down. In the meantime, the acting director of IMLS issued a request for information to all of the states. The document was given to all board members at the Meeting. I explained to them the impact LSTA funds has on the people in Alabama. Our annual appropriation is approximately \$3 million.

Ms. Martin – Have we ever done an impact report that can be given to the media and to the community to see the great works public libraries do?

Ryan Godfrey – Some of that was in the annual report - More of that information will be added to the APLS annual report.

**Letter to Public Libraries - President's Executive Order on Transgenderism - (January 20, 2025) – John Wahl**

A letter has been drafted and will be sent to public libraries.

**Letter to Fairhope Public Library – Compliant/Non-Compliant with State Aid Rules - John Wahl**

I think they are still working on the review process. We will wait on an update from them once the review process is completed at the local level.

**Status of Filling Essential Positions at APLS –**

**Administration Division - ASA II or Retired State Employee**

Kelyn Ralya - We have been looking for an ASA II as a back-up for the front desk for close to a year but have not been successful. I am going to meet with Vanessa and Keith on this. The closing of the library for renovations is being considered as a dry run to see how things are. Quite a few people are looking for a public library when coming to APLS. However, this is still in the preliminary stages and we want to use the staff we have as efficiently as possible.

Katie Bailey – We want to provide the same service, but we're thinking that people make appointments and we can accommodate them. We are hoping to allow more flexibility for front desk staff.

Mr. Wahl – When I look at the amount of people coming through the front door, it's really not efficient enough to have someone sit behind the desk for a few people.

### **Information Technology (IT) Division - IT Technician**

Kelyn Ralya - The IT Help Desk needs an IT Technician; the position has been vacant for a year. There is one person performing the duties instead of two. The Help Desk has a supervisor over them who alternates on the desk. This position was placed on hold at the last meeting because of budget constraints. Now, we know the budget can allow for this position. We are requesting the Board's permission to interview and fill the position.

Katie Bailey – This position is for public libraries who have no IT technicians on staff. This position can help provide assistance during regular work hours. There are two people for coverage issues. Ms. Martin made the motion to hire an IT Technician in the IT Division. Mrs. Windsor seconded the motion. Members voting in favor by saying “aye” are as follows: Amy Minton, John Wahl, Kasandra Stevens, Debra Windsor, and Jerria Martin. No “nays”. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

### **New Business**

#### **Legislative Update – FY2025-2026 - APLS Budget**

Chairman Wahl – I am excited to say that we are the first state in the country to have a safety net for our local libraries. That is a big deal, it shows this Board's commitment to public libraries. One of the chief missions of APLS is to secure funding for libraries and their needs.

Mrs. Minton – I want to say thank you to the senators, the legislators, Governor Ivey, all public library directors who called their senators, and to you, John Wahl, for getting \$3 million as a contingency back up. I don't think any of us could have done that, so thank you. The Board congratulated Mr. Wahl.

Mr. Wahl – It was a labor of love; I love libraries and this Board. I think together we can accomplish great things.

#### **Waiver of the State Aid Rules for FY2025 - Horseshoe Bend Regional Library –Funding Pinson Public Library - Funding**

Horseshoe Bend Regional Library requests a waiver of the state aid rules for funding - 520-2-2-.04(c). Samantha Godsy, Director, requests the Board's approval to waive the rule that prevents the use of more than 50% of state aid for salaries during any fiscal year. The Board denied the waiver for Horseshoe Bend during FY2022.

Pinson Public Library requests a waiver of the state aid rules for funding – 520-2-2-.04. Budget appropriations for FY2025 are less than the previous year, the difference of \$129,120.00. Pinson has no waiver request on file. Ms. Stevens made the motion to approve both waivers. Ms. Martin seconded the motion. Members voting in favor by saying “aye” are as follows: John Wahl, Debra Windsor, Amy Minton, Jerria Martin, and Kasandra Stevens. No “nays”. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

### **On a Different Topic**

Ms. Stevens informed the Board that she visited several Baldwin County libraries and was very impressed with the facilities and directors. She went to Fairhope, Daphne, and Spanish Fort public libraries. She can't say enough good things about all three libraries and wants to commend Spanish Fort. They have taken several hits from the media and she wants to recommend them for a commendation. The director and board are working very hard to meet the needs of the community but also to be in compliance. It's important that this Board recognize that local libraries are trying to do that effort. Ms. Stevens made a verbal commendation. Mrs. Minton seconded the commendation. Members voting in favor by saying “aye” are as follows: Jerria Martin, John Wahl, Debra Windsor, Amy Minton, and Kasandra Stevens. No “nays”. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Ms. Stevens – Shanavia Reed is the Director of Spanish Fort Library and she showed me some examples where they were reaching out to the board on assurances and guidance on what to do. They need back-up so no one can say they are not in compliance. I just want to make sure we support them. The directors want to work together as a team and we want to give them the support they need. I plan on visiting more libraries and getting their input. I feel it will help me do a better job on this Board.

**On a Different Topic****Gender Ideology Deemed Inappropriate for Children Under APLS Code – What is inappropriate for Children?**

Mrs. Minton presented to the Board a working document forwarded to the Attorney General's Office (handout). Not targeting anyone or person, but we do have Executive Orders and laws in the state of Alabama to follow. Having children's books that go against Executive Orders is inappropriate. She proceeded to read the document for consideration and no vote was taken. If the Board has input, send to Kelyn Ralya for compilation to be discussed in a future open meeting.

**Director's Report****APLS Financial Update – Jennifer Holman**

State funds are 75% obligated. APLS is right on track. The middle section is federal funds. We have not spent as much because it's been on pause.

**Building Updates – Randy Garmon**

As of right now, everything is on track and should be completed by June 5, 2025, including new wall coverings, ceilings, electrical, flooring, and HVAC. This is something we needed to do and we had the funds to do it. We've saved a few thousand dollars on a project downstairs so we are putting that towards re-doing our bathrooms upstairs. Construction as of right now is on schedule other than the addendum to do the bathrooms. We are waiting on that right now to be ADA compliant.

**Administrators' Meeting – April 17, 2025**

Kelyn Ralya - The Administrators' Meeting was held on April 17, 2025 via video-conference. The Administrative Memorandum and Agenda was provided as well as statistics. The meeting was very well attended.

212 public libraries participated

249 persons attended

The next Administrators' Meeting will be in July – it may be hybrid. We want to be flexible for them.

**Receptionist Desk Activity Sheets – February and March 2025**

Activity sheets for the front receptionist desk were provided to the Board for February and March 2025.

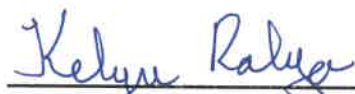
**Adjournment**

Chairman called the Meeting for adjournment at 3:30 p.m. Ms. Martin made the motion for adjournment. Mrs. Minton and Mrs. Windsor seconded the motion. Vote taken, all in favor. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

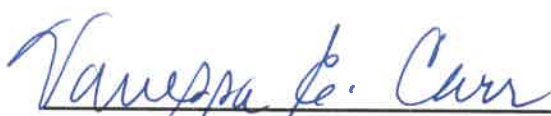
The next meeting will be held on July 17, 2025.



Chairman



Kelyn L. Ralya, Interim Director



Vanessa E. Carr, Recording Secretary