

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LOUISIANA

State Convention, Lafayette, March 4-5, 2023

RESOLUTION ON LIBRARY CENSORSHIP

RESOLUTION TEXT

Offered by Bonnie Schmidt

“Resolve to enable state and local leagues to publicly advocate in support of libraries under the first amendment and in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion.”

RESOLUTION NARRATIVE

Prepared by M. Christian Green

The LWV of Louisiana offers this resolution for adoption at the state level because of the library censorship issue’s intersection with four primary areas of LWV positions and policies.

(1) Citizens’ Rights/Individual Liberties

Attempts to restrict access to library holdings, by all citizens but particularly by young people, impede their developing sense of rights and access to knowledge and information that are fundamental to free speech and free thought. Attempts to prevent parents from voicing their preferences as to whether borrowing policies should be restricted by any criteria, but particularly by age and concerning questions of whether parents can opt into or opt out of restriction, impede adults in exercising their parental responsibilities. Young people have rights and parents have responsibilities. Policies and proposals of library censorship and restriction impede both of these crucial sets of rights and responsibilities.

(2) Citizen’s Right to Know/ Citizen Participation

Access to public libraries and their holdings are essential to building and educated and informed citizenry, particularly for children and young adults to flourish intellectually and civically so that they can assume the responsibilities of citizenship as adults. Restrictions on library access and holding impede the citizen’s right to know and rights to knowledge in ways that can also impede citizen participation. Library board policies that are unduly restrictive of speech and commentary by the public impede their rights as citizens, sometimes to the detriment of entire communities who are barred from public participations in decisions governing library holdings and access.

(3) Open and Transparent Government

The LWV supports representative government and democracy and policies and procedures that

make these work. The State of Louisiana has robust laws governing public meetings and openness and transparency of government. Conduct of library boards that departs from principles of democracy, representative government, and open and transparent government violate these core principles—particularly when the issues at hand, especially around library censorship themselves invoke the other principles of citizen rights. Policies and actions that unnecessarily restrict the public’s input into the conduct of library boards as public entities appointed by parish and municipal appointees impede the openness and transparency of government functions.

(4) Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (Sexual and Gender Orientation and Youth)

Recent efforts at library censorship have focused on restricting access to materials that dealt with issues of sexual and gender orientation and LGTBQ status, particularly by young people. Young adulthood is a time when people are growing intellectually and into their identities as persons and as citizens. Library censorship practices that disproportionately impact LGBTQ youth work against their inclusion in a diverse and equitable society. When they coincide with other state and local policies that, for example, restrict young people’s access to information about voting and voter registration, as has happened recently in Louisiana, they constitute a double assault on young people a crucial stage of intellectual and civic development.