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To: Toronto Public Library Board – April 19, 2004
From: City Librarian
Subject: **Requests for Reconsideration of Library Materials – 2003 Annual Report**

Purpose:

To provide an overview of the process for dealing with requests for the reconsideration of materials in the Toronto Public Library's collections and to provide a summary of those requests received in 2003.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

Not applicable.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board receive the *Requests for Reconsideration of Library Materials – 2003 Annual Report* for information.

Background:

The Library provides a process for members of the public to complain about books and other material in the Library's collection. These customer complaints are dealt with in the context of the Materials Selection Policy and the principles of intellectual freedom, both of which were approved by the Board at its meeting on June 26, 2000. The relevant section of the policy is re-stated here:

The Library believes that a vital society encourages members of its community to actively participate in an open exchange of ideas and opinions. Material selectors consequently strive to provide the widest possible range of resources within Toronto Public Library collections.

The content or manner of expressing ideas in material that is purposely selected to fill the needs of some library users, may, on occasion, be considered to be offensive by other library users. The Library recognizes the right of any individual or group to reject library material for personal use, but does not accord to any individual or group the right to restrict the freedom of others to make use of that same material.

Library users who object to materials located in a library collection are asked to complete a written request for the reconsideration of the materials. Request forms are available for this purpose at local library branches.

Comments:

The procedures are intended to ensure that the concerns of the customer are dealt with in a timely manner and with sensitivity. Typically, complaints are received at the branch level. Staff have the opportunity to discuss the customer's concerns with them and provide them with a copy of the materials selection policy. This discussion often addresses the customer's concerns and no further action is required. Customers wishing to pursue the complaint fill out a form detailing their concerns and this form is sent to the Collection Development Manager, who forwards it to the Materials Review Committee. A letter of acknowledgement is sent to the customer explaining the process.

The Materials Review Committee is a standing committee with a rotating membership made up of experienced public service librarians. They share a mixture of expertise on adult, teen and children's materials but may call in other experts, for example, subject or language specialists, as needed. The Committee researches the disputed title by considering reviews, the author's reputation, coverage of the subject in the collection, its popularity, historical importance, etc., all within the context of the Materials Selection Policy. The decision on the disposition of the item is communicated in writing to the customer by the City Librarian.

Challenges to titles in the collection received by the Materials Review Committee in 2003 and the actions taken are listed in Attachment 1. Most complaints focus on sexual, violent or racist content as well as content which is perceived to be politically biased. Customers do not necessarily want a title removed from the collection, but may request other actions such as that it be reclassified, labeled or moved to another part of the collection.

In summary, eight complaints about eleven titles were received by the Materials Review Committee in 2003, broken down as follows:

- eight books, one video, one periodical and one newspaper;
- all English language;
- six adult titles and five children's/teen titles.

All items were retained in the collection and the Library will continue to distribute the free newspaper, *eye weekly*. The rating on the video was corrected.

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Josephine Bryant
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List of Attachments:

Attachment 1: Materials Review Committee – Reconsideration of Materials Summary - 2003