



To: Toronto Public Library Board – June 25, 2001

From: City Librarian

Subject: **Materials Selection Policy – Reconsideration of Materials 2000**

Purpose:

To provide an overview of the library materials complaint process and to provide a summary of those complaints received in 2000.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

Not applicable.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board receive the *Materials Selection Policy – Reconsideration of Materials 2000* report for information.

Background:

Occasionally, members of the public 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. Every attempt is made to resolve the challenge or complaint at the local level. Customers wishing to pursue a complaint beyond the branch level, fill out a form detailing their concerns and, if the complaint is not satisfied locally, 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 five 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. A recommendation on its disposition is made and communicated to the customer in writing.

Challenges to titles in the collection received by the Materials Review Committee in 2000 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 or inaccurate. Customers do not necessarily want a title removed from the collection, but may request that it be reclassified or moved to another part of the collection.

In 2000, only one title, a promotional video with misleading health claims was withdrawn. In two cases, a politically biased Vietnamese grammar and a dated, but important psychology text, were transferred to the Toronto Reference Library. In this way, their historical significance was recognized and they remain available for research purposes.

In summary, 12 complaints were received by the Materials Review Committee, broken down as follows:

- four videos, one cassette and seven books
- one Chinese, one Vietnamese and ten English items
- eight adult titles and four children's

One video was removed, two books were transferred to the Toronto Reference Library and the remaining nine items were retained in the general collection.

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List of Attachments:

Materials Review Committee – Reconsideration of Materials Summary – 2000