

Requests for Reconsideration of Library Materials – 2006 Annual Report

Date:	March 26, 2007
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the process for dealing with requests for the reconsideration of materials in the Library's collections, and to provide a summary of thirteen requests received in 2006. The number of complaints continues to remain low relative to the size of the population served.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Not applicable.

ISSUE 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 restated 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 reconsideration of the materials. Request forms are available for this purpose at local library branches.

The procedures for the reconsideration of library materials 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 has 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 chaired by a Manager 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.

COMMENTS

Challenges to titles in the collection received by the Materials Review Committee in 2006 and the actions taken are listed in Attachment 1. Customers do not necessarily want a title removed from the collection, but may request other actions such as that it be reclassified or labeled.

In summary, 13 complaints were received by the Materials Review Committee, three from the same person. Twelve titles were in English and one DVD in Hebrew with English subtitles. They included two adult books, two teen books, three children's books, five adult videos and one adult magazine. Twelve titles were retained in the collection and one was withdrawn. An unrated DVD was given a 14A rating.

As noted in the summary chart, the book, *The Prince Dethroned*, was published by PublishAmerica, one of a growing number of print-on-demand (POD) companies supported by the availability of digital printing systems. These publishers accept any manuscript, perform no fact-checking or editing, and simply print the book when an order is received. Authors promote and sell their own books and often send them as donations to libraries in order to legitimize them to other potential buyers. Another route into the library is through a customer request for the title, usually from the author's family or friends. The Collection Development Department is now tracking these publishers and will not purchase or accept titles from them unless reviewed in a reputable source (there

is a companion industry of authors offering reviews for a fee), or by a staff member if the subject is deemed of interest, e.g. local history.

The number of complaints dealt with by the Materials Review Committee remains low relative to the population served, reflecting the Toronto public's appreciation of the breadth of TPL's collection and its understanding of the application of intellectual freedom in a library setting.

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SIGNATURE

Josephine Bryant
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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Materials Review Committee – Reconsideration of Materials Summary
– 2006