

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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Rocky Hanna
Superintendent
Leon County Schools
2757 West Pensacola Street
Tallahassee, FL 32304

Re: Removal of the bible from Leon County Schools

Dear Superintendent Hanna and School Board members:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to request that the bible be removed from Leon County Schools' school libraries based on the sexually explicit content that it contains. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 40,000 members across the country, including more than 2,000 members and a local chapter in Florida. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

It is our understanding that the District recently banned five books from its libraries based on a request from Moms for Liberty because the books contained "sexually explicit content." It is our understanding that the District's policy is that when someone brings a concerning book to your attention you "review[] them personally and they [are] removed."¹ You have explained that "if we come across those we deem are in violation of state statute, we will remove them immediately," and that the books you removed were "black-and-white, cut-and-dry, need-to-be removed." These books were "Dead End" by Jason Myer, "Doomed" by Chuck Palahniuk, "Lucky" by Alice Sebold, "Me, Earl and the Dying Girl" by Jesse Andrews, and "Push" by Sapphire.

"Push" by Sapphire is a fictional book about a teenager who has two children and HIV from her father, who raped her. The award-winning book was made into an award-winning 2009 movie called "Precious." "Lucky" by Alice Sebold is a memoir about how the author's life changed after she was raped at 18 years old.

We write to request that the District either ban the bible based on the criterion of "sexually explicit content" it has used to ban these books, or cease banning books and return the banned books to school shelves. The District cannot ban books because it disagrees with the viewpoint expressed while allowing other sexually explicit books, like the bible, because it supports their viewpoint.

In the bible, rape is not only described, but the victims are forced to marry their rapists.² One bible story tells of a prostitute who "lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose

¹<https://www.jacksonville.com/story/news/politics/2023/07/11/moms-for-liberty-leads-florida-school-district-to-pull-five-books/70397263007/>

² Deuteronomy 22:28–29.

emission was like that of horses,” who “longed for the lewdness of your youth, when . . . [her] bosom was caressed and your young breasts fondled.”³ This same story speaks about sex toys: you “took the fine jewelry I gave you, the jewelry made of my gold and silver, and you made for yourself male idols and engaged in prostitution with them.”⁴ Another book of the bible has a character who prays, “may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love.”⁵ In yet another bible story, a future husband purchases a wife by killing 200 of her fathers’ enemies, mutilating their corpses, and bringing back their foreskins as a dowry.⁶ Another sordid and preposterous story that defames incest victims recounts the exploits of two daughters who, having just witnessed a genocide and the murder of their mother by a pyromaniacal god, supposedly got their father drunk and seduced him in order to bear his children.⁷ Yet another book describes sperm, intercourse, menstruation, homosexuality, bestiality, adultery and whores.⁸ Another depicts a holy man impaling a woman through her belly and describes in loving detail how to steal and rape virgins as war booty.⁹ Yet another tale tells how a woman has her hand cut off for touching a man’s penis.¹⁰ In other passages, women’s skirts are lifted over their face so their nakedness and shame can be exposed to all.¹¹ Another tale describes a man touching a woman’s “hole of the door” and how her “bowels were moved for him.”¹²

These and many more unpalatable and sexually explicit stories are found in the various books of the bible. Our educational association has published a brochure, *An X-Rated Book: Sex & Obscenity In the Bible*, which exposes nearly 150 bible verses displaying a “pornographic view of sex and women, lewdness, depravity and sexual violence often ordered or countenanced by the biblical deity.” It can be read for free on our website.¹³

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker has written an entire book on the evils of the bible, *GOD: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction*. Chapters document “divinely” ordered genocide, infanticide and filicide, among many other atrocities, as well as the biblical deity’s racism, sexism, slavemongering and sadomasochism. An interactive companion website details all of this and more.¹⁴ These verses are one reason why FFRF makes available bible warning labels to place on hotel bibles saying, “Warning: Literal belief in this book may endanger your health and life.”¹⁵

It is important to note that removal of the bible would not constitute hostility toward Christianity or religion. The District must hold religious texts to the same standards it holds all other library books, review them, and, if they contain the same sexually explicit content as the bible, must also remove them under the District’s pattern and practice. Removing the bible for its obscenity or graphic sexual content based on neutral criteria is not religious discrimination.

FFRF advocates, above all, for freedom of thought. We oppose the concept of banning books from school libraries. We believe that there is no true freedom of thought, conscience or even religion, unless our government and its public schools are free from religion and its control over thought. We are deeply

³ Ezekiel 23:20–21.

⁴ Ezekiel 16:17.

⁵ Proverbs 5:19.

⁶ 1 Samuel 18:27.

⁷ Genesis 19.

⁸ Leviticus.

⁹ Numbers.

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 25:11–12.

¹¹ Nahum 3:5.

¹² Song of Solomon 5:4.

¹³ Available at ffrf.org/component/k2/item/23733-an-x-rated-book-sex-obscenity-in-the-bible.

¹⁴ Available at unpleasant.ffrf.org/.

¹⁵ Available at ffrf.org/shop/accessories/bumper-stickers-15/bible-warning-labels-skull-crossbones-78-detail.

familiar with the haunting history of censorship—from the Catholic Church’s Index Librorum Prohibitorum, to the Comstock laws, to the Nazi book burnings, the attacks on authors such as Charles Darwin and Salman Rushdie, and the murders of Bangladeshi bloggers such as Avijit Roy. Heinrich Heine famously observed, “Where they burn books, they will end in burning human beings.” History never looks kindly on book censors and burners.

The best solution is to leave a diversity of viewpoints in school libraries, and trust students to explore complex topics themselves by not banning books from school libraries. However, so long as the District is choosing to remove books containing sexual content, the bible may not be given special treatment and must be removed too.

The “inappropriate” sections of the majority of books targeted by groups like “Moms for Liberty” are typically minor parts of books that have literary value. Reading takes time, and understanding books critically takes even more thought. Those who propose book bans target gullible audiences with selective material. They fear free inquiry and independence of thought. Much of the book banning impetus is manufactured, with pre-made lists of books and quotes circulated by self-righteous grandstanders who are hostile to critical thinking. In short, the current wave of book banning is not about protecting children, it is about discouraging thought.

We are disturbed that the District has chosen to start removing books from school libraries based on content taken out of context at the request of extremist groups like Moms For Liberty. Because the District has established a standard for inappropriate content that clearly encompasses the sexually explicit materials contained in the bible, so long as you plan to ban other books, and the books you have already banned remain unavailable, you must be even-handed about your purge and immediately remove the bible as well. If you find that the vast amount of sexually explicit material in the bible does not warrant its removal from district schools, then this same lower standard must be applied to all books with similar content. It is our understanding that under a recently enacted Florida law, if an objection is filed on the basis that materials contain pornography or depictions of “sexual conduct,” the books or materials must be removed within five school days “and remain unavailable until the objection is resolved.” We expect this request to be given the same treatment as Moms for Liberty’s, and that you will consider the bible’s “black-and-white, cut-and-dry” sexual content the same as any other book’s. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Christopher Line
Staff Attorney
Freedom From Religion Foundation