

April 7, 2025

For Immediate Release

An Open Letter to the People of Fairhope

From APLS Chairman John Wahl

Dear Citizens of Fairhope,

As Chairman of the Alabama Public Library Service, I want to begin by expressing my deep appreciation for the important role that public libraries play in our communities. They are places of learning, imagination, and discovery for people of all ages—and they are vital to the intellectual and cultural growth of our state.

I want the people of Fairhope to know that the Alabama Public Library Service is committed to listening to your concerns, putting people first, and ensuring that public libraries remain focused on serving our communities. There has been a great deal of misinformation and intentional misrepresentation regarding the decision of the APLS Board to pause funding for the Fairhope Public Library. I want to take this opportunity to set the record straight and reaffirm the Board's commitment to ensuring our public libraries remain welcoming and appropriate spaces for all Alabama families.

Some have tried to label the APLS Board as “far-right radicals.” I respectfully and strongly disagree. The real extremism lies in the increasing effort to normalize the sexualization of our children. Our society has always prioritized protecting the innocence of childhood—whether through film ratings, television guidelines, or music advisories. I have been heartbroken to hear concerned parents read aloud from books marketed to young readers that contain some of the most vulgar and sexually explicit content I have ever encountered. No child should be exposed to this type of

content without the full awareness and consent of their parents. The APLS Board will not apologize for taking a stand to protect our children.

The decision to temporarily pause funding to the Fairhope Library was not made lightly. It was taken to ensure the library fully complies with state codes designed to balance the rights and concerns of all parents. Our goal is not to limit access to information for those who want it, but to ensure that sexually explicit materials are placed in age-appropriate sections so that parents can maintain control over what is appropriate for their children.

I have been in direct contact with the leadership of the Fairhope Library, and we are actively working toward a resolution. Last week, I provided a list of necessary steps to bring the library into full compliance with state code. These include three key points:

1. Re-locating all sexually explicit materials from youth sections to the adult section, ensuring that books with mature content are appropriately placed.
2. Establishing a clear process for Fairhope parents to request book reviews based on state code requirements concerning sexual content, allowing the community to have a voice in maintaining age-appropriate library materials.
3. Implementing a library card system that gives parents the ability to decide whether their children can or cannot check out books from the adult section, reinforcing parental oversight and choice.

These common-sense measures will ensure that all families have access to the materials they want while preventing children from unintentionally encountering sexually explicit content without parental consent. Our goal is to work with the Fairhope Library to achieve compliance before any funding is affected, ensuring a fair and reasonable solution for everyone.

Good government listens to and respects the voices of all citizens, working toward solutions that address everyone's concerns if possible. The APLS codes were created with this in mind—to make sure that every family in Alabama feels safe in our public libraries. Parents who want their children to have broader access to materials have that ability, but at the same time, parents who do not want their children exposed to sexually explicit content should have confidence that such material is not inappropriately placed in youth sections.

Sexuality is a deeply personal and sensitive topic, and as a society, we must acknowledge that people hold different perspectives on how it should be addressed with children. The vast majority of Alabama parents do not want their children to accidentally stumble upon explicit content while browsing books in sections intended for young readers. Ensuring that such materials are relocated to appropriate areas is a reasonable step that respects the rights of all families without denying access to those who seek it.

Rather than allowing misinformation to divide us, we should focus on finding common ground. The APLS Board remains committed to working with local communities and library officials to ensure our libraries reflect the values of the people they serve. I encourage everyone to approach this discussion with honesty, respect, and a shared commitment to solutions that benefit everyone. We want to ensure that Alabama's libraries remain welcoming spaces for all families—and not just one side of this debate.

Sincerely,

John Wahl

Chairman, Alabama Public Library Service

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