

Gayle Furman

From: Amy & Al DOMEIKA <adomeika@comcast.net>
Sent: Tuesday, July 05, 2022 8:42 AM
To: Shawn Pelletier
Subject: Requesting a Special Meeting of the CORE Commission this Week

Hi Shawn,

Hope you had a nice weekend. I am writing to request that you call a special meeting of the CORE Commission this week to discuss the order to remove the book, "Who is RuPaul?" from the children's section of the Cragin Memorial Library.

"Book banning is a form of censorship occurs when private individuals, government officials, or organizations remove books from libraries, school reading lists, or bookstore shelves because they object to their content, ideas, or themes. Those advocating a ban complain typically that the book in question contains graphic violence, expresses disrespect for parents and family, is sexually explicit, exalts evil, lacks literary merit, is unsuitable for a particular age group, or includes offensive language... Book banning is the most common form of censorship in our country and children's literature is often targeted." (Middle Tennessee State University's Center for First Amendment John Seigenthaler Chair of Excellence in First Amendment Studies)

Colchester LGBTQIA community members are feeling under attack right now. Please see this [The New London Day](#) article where several of those topics are mentioned by the First Selectman as justification for ordering the book removed. For many, this isn't their first time having to defend their visibility. Over 70 emails have been sent to the Library Director and here is a quote from one: "Thanks for including these books for our children. I'm a Colchester resident. We always knew our child was different and having those picture books helped my kindergartener find the words to describe themselves. It also helped me understand my own child. I didn't know that sexuality and gender were two unrelated things. My child is able to confidently describe their gender now... all because of the books you've curated. It means so much to see those books and feel the support in town. It gives me hope that my child may grow up to be themselves in an accepting community. Love is love and I want my child to be able to see themselves in the offerings at the library."

Residents are also sending letters to the Board of Selectman. Here is one quote:

"I am writing in full support of having no children's books banned especially ones that are about inclusion. I feel it is important to offer LGBTQ+ for children to promote support and tolerance and also for children to see they are not alone. I am disgusted that our first selectman is asking for an inventory and ban on children's books he feels are offensive. "

Colchester residents who identify as LGBTQIA+ and/or participate in drag may feel especially targeted right now.

The order to remove this specific book, "Who is RuPaul?," from the children's section is particularly concerning as Drag queens are facing threats of violence across the country from groups such as the Proud Boys. Just last month alone, there were library-event attacks by Proud Boys in California, Nevada, and North Carolina. This has garnered national attention, notably in [Business Insider](#). Another similarity to the Colchester censorship attempt appeared on ABC and shows the current method of calling for the books to be moved to a more "appropriate" section of the library, insinuating that human diversity is inappropriate for kids. Furthermore, the attacks are happening in various forms around Connecticut. WTNH in New Haven recently reported of a national church

organization asking members to "Hide the Pride" and explicitly says, "American moms and dads do not want their children exposed to sexual and 'trans' content..."

Two charges of CORE at its creation are:

The commission shall have seven members and two alternates with 3-year terms, who shall strive to **advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion** in the areas of race, color, national origin, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disabilities, and income. Promote cultural diversity, social equity and a spirit of inclusiveness in Colchester by discovering, bridging, **supporting** and celebrating the various cultures in our town, including all groups as set forth above.

Work does not include:

The commission is not an investigative body for ethics complaints or any other interpersonal or systemic complaint related to Town employees or Town elected/appointed officials. The commission will act in an advisory capacity only with the scope limited to acting as a repository of information related to diversity, equity and inclusion resources. **This commission's work shall be accomplished through the members' outreach to the local community** and to state and federal resources

What can CORE do:

- Educate ourselves and the public about book banning and offer links to censorship educational material such as the American Library Association (The Censor: Motives and Tactics), NPR list of most challenged books in 2021, and USA Today (LGBTQ books are being banned from schools. Here's how kids can still read them.)
- Issue a statement of support to our LGBTQIA community.

I am requesting a special meeting of the CORE Commission be called for this week to discuss the action items above.

This is happening in our town whether CORE acknowledges it or not. It has made national media (The Daily Beast), social media (Facebook: George Takei, Twitter.com/PENAmerica) and CT state-wide media (The Hartford Courant, The New London Day, CT Public).

If we pass on this opportunity to offer a statement of support to LGBTQIA members of the community, we are at risk of losing the public's confidence and our creditability as a commission capable of meaningful impact. Looking at the First Selectman's page on Facebook, one particular commenter was brutal about seeing five white women celebrating Juneteenth. This negative sentiment will continue to grow if CORE does not act according to it's charge to advocate and support.

Regards,
Amy