

Office for Intellectual Freedom  
50 East Huron Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60611-2795

# ALA American Library Association

Mr. Robert Wilson, Superintendent  
Lakeview Local School District  
300 Hillman Drive  
Cortland, OH 44410

March 5, 2013

Dear Mr. Wilson,

I am writing on behalf of the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom, to express our concern regarding a challenge to the book *Sold* by Patricia McCormick at Lakeview Middle School. We understand that, in accordance with district policy, this book is currently under review by a reconsideration committee. We applaud the district for following established policies and procedures for handling concerns, and we strongly support the library media specialist in selecting materials for the school library that represent a wide range of diverse viewpoints. We urge the reconsideration committee and the district to retain *Sold* in the Lakeview Middle School library.

*Sold* is a novel that bravely chronicles the harsh and cruel life of a 13-year-old girl in Nepal. Its awards and recognition include the California Young Reader Medal, the Quill Book Awards, YALSA's 2007 Best Books for Young Adults, and YALSA's 2007 Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers. In a starred review, *Publishers Weekly* praised *Sold* and its protagonist, saying, "Readers will admire Lakshmi's grit and intelligence, and be grateful for a ray of hope for this memorable heroine at book's end." In reviewing this "heartbreaking story," *School Library Journal* notes that "thousands of girls, like Lakshmi in this story, are sold into prostitution each year. Part of McCormick's research for this novel involved interviewing women in Nepal and India, and her depth of detail makes the characters believable and their misery palpable. This important book was written in their honor."

Not all readers at Lakeview Middle School will be ready for – or interested in – engaging with the difficult issues raised by *Sold*. But school libraries have an obligation to meet the varied interests, abilities, and maturity levels of all students in the school community. Some pupils will be interested in and mature enough for *Sold*, and those students' rights to access the book should not be denied due to the objections of others in the district.

The request for the Lakeview Middle School library to remove *Sold* from its shelves represents an effort to suppress ideas and viewpoints deemed by some to be uncomfortable or offensive. Denying students access to information on such grounds undermines the school library's mission to help students acquire essential coping, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

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In addition, school officials are bound by constitutional considerations, including a duty not to discriminate against unpopular or controversial ideas. The U.S. Supreme Court has cautioned that, "local school boards may not remove books from library shelves simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books." *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853 (1982). This constitutional duty applies with particular force in the school library, which, unlike the classroom, has "a special role...as a place where students may freely and voluntarily explore diverse topics." *Campbell v. St. Tammany Parish School Board*, 64 F.3d 184, 190 (5th Cir. 1995).

As a place where young people learn to exercise choice in their own reading and thinking, the school library is a symbol to students of our most cherished freedom as Americans – the freedom to speak our minds and to hear what others have to say. We ask you to support this vital role of the school library and reaffirm your own district policy by retaining *Sold* in the Lakeview Middle School library. By doing so, the district will send a powerful message to students – that they have the right to choose their own reading material and to think critically about what they read.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angela Maycock". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Angela Maycock  
Assistant Director