



LIBRARIES Indiana

Indiana Senate Bill 288, which would make it a level 6 felony for schools and public libraries that share “harmful material” with minors, was withdrawn before its final reading.

Schools and public libraries currently have special protection against prosecution for dissemination of obscene materials to minors under Indiana state law. The bill would have stripped those protections and removed “educational purposes” as a defense against prosecution.

The Indiana American Civil Liberties Union issued a statement in opposition to SB 288, in part because it did not clearly define what constituted “harmful material to minors.”

The statement argued that “the vagueness of the statute could be used to silence protected speech on a multitude of various areas and has historically been used as a tool to ban sex education materials and materials about LGBTQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning] issues from local libraries if community members and local prosecutors find it objectionable.”

The bill’s author, Senator Jim Tomes (Republican), has previously characterized a Drag Queen Story Hour event held at the Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library as “immoral” and “inappropriate” for young children.

Senator Fady Qaddoura (Democrat) voted against the bill. “When you talk about biology classes and showing the human anatomy and other types of educational material, I feel that we are shooting ourselves, literally, in the foot on this issue by censoring what libraries and educational institutions should be able to use to educate our kids.”

Tomes withdrew the bill as it lacked sufficient support in the

Republican caucus, but indicated he will bring the bill back. He said: “The bill is still going to be the same. The goal will still be the same. I’m not going to back down from that.”

If the text of the bill is not tacked on as an amendment to another bill, the next opportunity for it to be introduced will be in the 2022 legislative session.

Reported in: *TheStatehouseFile.com*, February 24, 2021.

SCHOOLS Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Several parents anonymously informed local news sites that they planned to protest Angie Thomas’s novel *The Hate U Give* at the March 17 school board meeting of the North Allegheny High School.

The planned protest was widely reported, including on WPXI and in *The Uproar*, the North Allegheny Senior High School news site. In response, students and parents came out in force to defend the teaching of Thomas’s acclaimed novel.

When she heard of the planned protest, Angie Thomas tweeted: “I wish people were more upset about police brutality than they are about curse words.”

The Hate U Give is a young adult novel narrated by a Black teenager who witnesses a White police officer shoot and kill an unarmed Black man during a traffic stop. It was added to the ninth grade English curriculum in 2019, replacing *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

The Hate U Give appeared on the American Library Association’s Top 10 Most Challenged Books lists for 2017, 2018, and 2020. It has been challenged for including profanity, drug use, sexual references, and “was thought to promote an anti-police message.”

Thomas’s book has also won numerous awards, including a 2018 Michael L. Printz Award, three

Goodreads Choice Awards, the 2018 William C. Morris Award for best debut book for teens, the 2018 Indies Choice Award for Young Adult Book of the Year, and it was a 2018 Coretta Scott King Book Award honoree.

At the beginning of the unit in which Thomas’s novel was taught, parents received communication regarding the novel’s themes, situations, and language, as well as the school’s “commitment to addressing the content of the book in a professional and appropriate way.”

Families had the option to opt out and read another book, but none did so, according to Brandi Smith, the public relations and communications specialist for the district.

The five speakers who defended the book at the board meeting all read passages from it. Student Lamees Subeir also observed that there are “very few issues about Black struggle in the curriculum outside of slavery.”

“Please do not remove this book from the curriculum because it might be sensitive,” Subeir urged the board. “Sensitive just means that people do not want to talk about it.”

Another student, Avery Neely, argued that the book illustrates the urban/suburban divide, as its narrator lives in a poor and predominantly Black neighborhood, but attends a mostly White suburban preparatory school.

“What is the role of an educator if not to make sense of the world for the students?” Neely asked.

Parent Melinda Weddes said that the novel “opens the door to conversations about racism,” adding that, “It is important in a predominantly White district to educate students about racism.”

North Allegheny students also defended the book in their online student newspaper, *The Uproar*, where Sam Podnar stated, “I know that the



complaints were officially about drug use and language, but I think that it is the underlying discomfort with the ideas of police brutality and racism discussed in the book.”

Zoë Tracey said, “The resistance [to the book] is so clearly a reflection

of the inability of our community to acknowledge the unsettling situations Black Americans go through.”

None of the parents who indicated they would protest the book at the meeting did so. In fact, no one attending the meeting spoke out against the

book. *The Hate U Give* remains part of the North Allegheny High School’s 9th grade curriculum.

Reported in: *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 25, 2021; *The Uproar*, March 11, 2021.