



**LGBTQ QUALITY OF LIFE ADVISORY COMMISSION
RECOMMENDATION 20190812-4d**

Date August 12, 2019

Subject Support for the Austin Public Library's Drag Queen Story Hour and Other Diversity and Literacy Initiatives

Description of Recommendation to Council

The LGBTQ Quality of Life Advisory Commission recommends that the Austin City Council direct the City Manager to:

- Develop more LGBTQ cultural learning initiatives like Drag Queen Story Hour so that Austinites of all ages have the opportunity to develop deeper empathy for their neighbors;
- Secure the safety of participants in these LGBTQ cultural learning initiatives by working with organizations like the American Library Association (see attachment: "Hateful Conduct in Libraries: Supporting Library Workers and Patrons") to develop training and emergency response procedures; and
- Support Drag Queen Story Hour at the Austin Public Library and future LGBTQ cultural learning events.

Rationale

The Austin Public Library's mission is to provide open access to information and to promote literacy, love of reading, and lifelong learning opportunities for all members of the community. To that end, the Austin Public Library has partnered with the Austin International Drag Foundation to promote literacy, diversity, and acceptance by hosting Drag Queen Story Hours.

The Austin International Drag Foundation has stated that its goal of hosting Drag Queen Story Hours is to "capture the imagination and play of the gender fluidity of childhood and gives kids glamorous, positive, and unabashedly queer role models."

On August 8, 2019, representatives of the group MassResistance spoke to City Council during Citizen's Communications, asking the City to stop hosting Drag Queen Story Hour events at Austin Public Library branches.

MassResistance is based out of Massachusetts and is classified as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. MassResistance Austin coordinated the local effort via its Facebook Page, which was created on August 1, 2019, and has two members as of August 12, 2019. Their seeming lack of Austin-based support is underscored by their bringing in Tracy Shannon from Houston as one of their speakers. The speakers called Drag Queen Story Hour an "ideological crusade posing as a storytime" and claimed that exposing children to gender



diversity at a young age would confuse them. They also cited concerns about child safety and background checks.

The Austin Public Library has stated that they take child safety very seriously. Library staff run and are present for all youth events, Drag Queen Story Hours included. Further, guardians are required to accompany children under 10. As such, guest performers are not subject to background checks as the City of Austin trusts its library staff and the parents of young Austinites to keep children safe.

Unfortunately, isolated and often external opposition to these events has caused real concern for child safety.

On Saturday, January 26, 2019, James “Doc” Greene Sr., entered the Freed-Montrose Neighborhood Library while carrying a concealed weapon. Greene had previously received a trespassing warning for disrupting Drag Queen Story Time events and filming children without parental consent.

On March 19, 2019, the organizers of Drag Queen Story Time in Houston published the article “We Are the Organizers of Drag Queen Story Time. This Is Why We’re Stepping Aside” in the *Houstonia* magazine following continued threats against their events. They said, “We believe in what we’re doing, but we don’t believe in putting our friends, our families, or our children in danger.”

On June 5, 2019, a reporter from InfoWars attempted to disrupt a Drag Queen Story Hour at the Old Quarry Branch of the Austin Public Library. The reporter was asked to leave for disrupting the event and making a video recording for commercial use.

On Saturday, June 15, 2019, Open Cathedral hosted a Pride Celebration event at the Leander Public Library after the city staff canceled a Drag Queen Story Time following criticism. The event drew hundreds of protestors and counter-protesters, necessitating the mobilization of police and emergency services to manage the crowds and escort attendees into the library.

The danger to attendees of Drag Queen Story Hour events extends beyond the library. Neo-Nazi groups have encouraged their followers to collect personally identifying information (like license plate numbers) of parents who bring their children to story hour events. Members share this information on white supremacist networks, a practice known as doxing, in hopes others will use it to target, harass, and intimidate families.

Given the importance of teaching young Austinites the beauty of diversity and acceptance, it is imperative that the City of Austin strengthen these cultural learning initiatives, secure the safety of participants, and continue to support the Austin Public Library’s mission.



Vote

Date of Approval: August 12, 2019

Record of the vote: Adopted without objection on a 13-0 vote.

Present: Martinez, Gonzales, Baeza, Curry, Currence, Daniels, Doughty, Dowling, Gonzalez, Gorchynski, Hines, Taylor, Wollerson

Attest: Kathryn M. Gonzales
Kathryn Gonzales, Vice Chair

Hateful Conduct in Libraries: Supporting Library Workers and Patrons

Home | Proactive Preparation (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/hatefulconduct/preparation>) | Responding to an Incident ([hatefulconduct/incident](http://www.ala.org/advocacy/hatefulconduct/incident)) | Meeting Community Needs ([hatefulconduct/community](http://www.ala.org/advocacy/hatefulconduct/community)) | Special Considerations & Resources ([hatefulconduct/considerations_resources](http://www.ala.org/advocacy/hatefulconduct/considerations_resources))
What prompted the need for this document? | Assistance and Consultation | Definitions

What prompted the need for this document?

After the 2016 elections, there was a spike in reported hate crimes in American libraries. Consequently, questions about hate speech, the First Amendment, and patron behavior in the library are escalating. The American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom (<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/oif>) and Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services (<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/diversity>) have prepared this resource to provide additional guidance for librarians struggling with issues of hate and intolerance.

This resource focuses on public libraries, academia, and schools. Although private institutions are not held to the legal requirements of the First Amendment, the principles of free expression and respect are encouraged. Unique aspects to consider for each setting are outlined in the "Special Considerations" section of the document.

**"A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views."
— Article V, Library Bill of Rights**

This statement from the Library Bill of Rights establishes equal access for all as a fundamental user right. However, it is important to recognize that historical inequities, microaggressions, power, and privilege (white privilege, gender privilege, able-bodied privilege, etc.) impact library spaces every day. This may play out as negative bias in policies, access, or direct interactions with people of color, immigrants, refugees, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) communities. Creating an inclusive space requires ongoing education, discussions, and development for library staff and the communities served.

This guide can be used by libraries as they initiate conversations among staff members and within their communities. The guide is divided into three sections:

1. **Proactive Preparation** (What strategic steps can I take to prepare in the event hateful conduct situations occur within the library?)
2. **Responding to an Incident** (What do I do if hateful conduct is directed at me, a colleague, or a patron, and how do I follow-up?)
3. **Meeting Community Needs** (How do I balance access to all viewpoints while also identifying and supporting historically marginalized perspectives?)

Each section begins with a list of questions received by the ALA related to hateful conduct and free speech, followed by statements to consider before, during, and after a hateful incident. Each section ends with suggestions on how to support library staff and patrons. This document should not be construed as legal

advice but may provide insight as to when a library may need to seek legal advice or consult law enforcement. If legal advice or expert assistance is required, you or your library should seek the services of a competent legal professional.

A note on language: Throughout this document, we use the term “historically marginalized” to refer to communities that have and continue to experience oppression within the United States context. We recognize it as an imperfect term, and chose to use it over others as we felt it best highlights the active role institutions, including libraries at times, have played in upholding injustice. As language evolves and laws change, this document will continue to be updated. This resource is not meant to provide advice for every incident that can arise — as situations and reactions differ based on each unique community and its members — but it is a starting point to initiate discussions in all types of libraries.

Assistance and Consultation

The staff of the Office for Intellectual Freedom (<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/oif>) and the Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services (<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/diversity>) are available to answer questions or provide assistance to librarians, trustees, and educators about workplace speech, patron behavior, hate crimes, and responding to hate speech or hateful conduct. Areas of assistance include policy development and staff training. Inquiries can be directed via email to diversity@ala.org (<mailto:diversity@ala.org>), oif@ala.org (<mailto:oif@ala.org>), or via phone at 1-800-545-2433.

Definitions

The following section provides definitions and context for important terms pertaining to hateful conduct, equity, diversity, and inclusion. It also provides an introduction to the legal framework surrounding hateful conduct. This is not a comprehensive list. It is intended to provide a baseline for terminology and concepts discussed later in the document.

Diversity

Diversity (<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/odlos-glossary-terms>) can be defined as the sum of the ways that people are both alike and different. Visible diversity is generally those attributes or characteristics that are external. However, diversity goes beyond the external to internal characteristics that we choose to define as “invisible” diversity. Invisible diversity includes those characteristics and attributes that are not readily seen. When we recognize, value, and embrace diversity, we are recognizing, valuing, and embracing the uniqueness of each individual.

Equity

Equity (<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/odlos-glossary-terms>) is not the same as formal equality. Formal equality implies sameness. Equity, on the other hand, assumes difference and takes difference into account to ensure a fair process and, ultimately, a fair (or equitable) outcome. Equity recognizes that some groups were (and are) disadvantaged in accessing educational and employment opportunities and are, therefore, underrepresented or marginalized in many organizations and institutions. The effects of that exclusion often linger systemically within organizational policies, practices, and procedures. Equity, therefore, means increasing diversity by ameliorating conditions of disadvantaged groups.

Harassment

Harassment is unwanted, unwelcomed, and uninvited behavior that demeans, threatens, or offends the victim. Harassment can take on many forms and have serious repercussions. Generally, harassment is defined as “unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information.” An example of this would be if a patron was called a derogatory comment by another patron. The complexities and repercussions of harassment can occur in the library and take place between the staff, patrons and staff, and between patrons.

Criminal harassment is governed by state law and defined as a course of conduct which annoys, threatens, intimidates, alarms, or puts a person in fear of their safety.

Hate Crime

Hate crime (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/hate>) is more than speech; it is criminal behavior or criminal acts motivated by prejudice. For the purposes of collecting statistics, the FBI (<https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/civil-rights/hate-crimes>) has defined a hate crime as a “criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity.” Hate crimes (<https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/learn-about-hate-crimes>), which can also encompass a person’s color or national origin, are overt acts that can include violence against persons or property, violation of civil rights, conspiracy, certain “true threats,” and acts of intimidation. The Supreme Court has upheld laws that either criminalize these acts or impose a harsher punishment when it can be proven that the defendant targeted the victim because of the victim's race, ethnicity, identity, or beliefs.

A hate crime doesn’t just impact one person or object; a hate crime can affect the entire community and create an atmosphere of animosity and alienation. Examples of hate crimes include the vandalizing of a library bathroom stall with swastikas, or the defacing of a library book about LGBTQ+ issues.

Hate Speech

Hate speech (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/hate>) doesn’t have a legal definition under U.S. law, just as there is no legal definition for rudeness, evil ideas, unpatriotic speech, or any other kind of speech that people might condemn. However, hate speech is defined in “Free Speech and the Development of Liberal Virtues (<https://repository.law.miami.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1693&context=umlr>)” as “any form of expression through which speakers intend to vilify, humiliate, or incite hatred against a group or a class of persons.”

In the United States (and in contrast to many European countries and Canada), hate speech — whether it occurs as spoken language within the library, in print, online, or any other library format — has substantial protection under the First Amendment. While there are several categories of speech (<https://www.freedomforuminstitute.org/about/faq/which-types-of-speech-are-not-protected-by-the-first-amendment/>) that are unprotected under the First Amendment, hateful speech is not among them.

Hateful Conduct

Hateful conduct promotes intimidation and hate against people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or serious disease. For the purposes of this document, hateful conduct is more than a statement; it can be ongoing and behavioral. Hateful conduct often does not meet the criteria of criminal harassment or stalking statutes.

The following visual includes examples meant to help discern distinctions among hate speech, hateful conduct, and hate crimes, highlighting their escalation.

Hate Speech

Using a written or verbal insult or slur about a specific person based on hate, e.g., “All [racial, ethnic, or gender slur] are criminals.”

Hateful Conduct

Posting flyers with symbols identified with a group or movement targeting persons because of their race, ethnicity, gender or gender identity; positioning toys or materials into hate symbols or threatening acts; leaving pamphlets that promote hate groups and hate speech in the pages of books

Hate Crime

Vandalizing books or walls with symbols associated with a hate movement; physical assault, or unwanted physical contact, directed toward a person because of their race, religion, belief, sexual orientation, or other identities

Inclusion

Inclusion (<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/odlos-glossary-terms>) means an environment in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully; are valued for their distinctive skills, experiences, and perspectives; have equal access to resources and opportunities, and can contribute fully to the organization’s success.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersectionality>) refers to the ways in which multiple identities, and systems of oppression, combine and overlap in marginalized communities’ lived experiences. The term was first coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 essay (<https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1052&context=uclf>) and is used to highlight the ways in which gender, race, ability, and other systems cannot be explored in a vacuum from one another.

Marginalization

Marginalization (<http://counselingcenter.syr.edu/social-justice/impact-of-marginalization.html>) refers to the treatment of a person or group as insignificant, “less-than,” or otherwise second-class. People may hold multiple marginalized identities (see “intersectionality” above) and thus experience compounding barriers. Examples of marginalized identities include people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, refugees and immigrants, and people with disabilities.

Microaggression

A microaggression (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/microaggression>) is an intentional or unintentional interaction that communicates or reinforces hostile, oppressive, or prejudiced attitudes towards a marginalized group. The term was first coined by Dr. Chester Pierce in the 1970s, and expanded by Dr. Derald Wing Sue et al. in a 2007 article (<https://www.dds.ca.gov/HealthDevelopment/SARC/RacialMicroaggressions.pdf>) about white psychologists and their interactions with clients of color.

Oppression

Oppression (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/oppression>) may be defined as “unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power.” Oppression can occur on various levels (<https://msw.usc.edu/mswusc-blog/diversity-workshop-guide-to-discussing-identity-power-and-privilege/>) via laws that work to keep specific groups in power in which they continue to benefit, media representation or lack thereof, and the erasure of marginalized communities’ history or voices.

Privilege

Privilege (<https://nccj.org/resources/social-justice-definitions>) refers to the ways in which those individuals or groups with more power and access benefit, both directly and indirectly, from structures and institutions designed by and for that group, to the detriment of other groups. “Privilege is often invisible to those who have it.”

Social Justice

Social justice (<https://www.suffolk.edu/campuslife/27883.php>) refers to both the process and the aim of creating an equitable world. It involves acknowledging oppressive systems and institutions and actively working to dismantle them. The goal is to promote egalitarianism regardless of race, religion, creed, color, sexual orientation, gender identity, and national origin.

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