

We have a new Materials Reconsideration Policy here in Montgomery County. What is in the policy?

Montgomery County residents were fired up Tuesday morning, March 26th, about item 10.A on the Commissioner's Court agenda. This item was the new library book reconsideration policy, presented by County Judge Mark Keough and Commissioner Robert Walker. The policy was written by Judge Keough and his staff. It passed in a 3 to 1 vote. Commissioner James Noack was not present and Commissioner Riley was the only no vote.

There was a lot confusing discussion being tossed about. After hearing some of the public comments, one might think that the library will have no books by the end of the summer! Nothing could be further from the truth. The main purpose of the new policy is to provide a means for citizens to facilitate moving a book from one age group section to another either more or less restrictive. Let's take a quick look at the old policy and then see what is really in this new policy. I think you will find it to be level-headed and fair.

Our current Reconsideration Policy established by the court in 2013 employs a Reconsideration Committee that is already in existence. Each commissioner currently has one citizen appointee on this committee. This committee is not the same as the Advisory Board, which is a separate appointed group of people.

Here are a few facts about the current Reconsideration Committee:

- **There are currently 10 members – 5 librarians and 5 citizens.**
- **The committee never takes a vote and nothing they do is binding.** The committee simply holds a discussion which may or may not be taken into account by the library director when making the final decision. This is why I call it a Kangaroo Committee.
- **The current committee is closed to the public.**
- **11 books, total, were reviewed by the committee last year.** Of those 11 books, 10 contained information about gender transition and 10 were located in the children's section of the library. The majority of these books also contained information about suicide, self-harm, hiding internet search history from parents, and other alarming information that young kids may not be ready for.

Before we take a look at the new policy, very briefly, let me bring your attention to the books that I felt compelled to bring to the court's attention last year:

George by Alex Gino (for ages 9+)

"So you're, like, transgender or something?" Kelly whispered as best she could in her excitement. "I was reading on the Internet, and there are lots of people like you. Did you know you can take hormones so that your body, you know, doesn't go all manlike?"

"Yeah, I know." George had been reading websites about transitioning since Scott had taught her how to clear the web browser history on Mom's computer. "But you need your parents' permission."

The Pants Project by Cat Clarke (for ages 9+)

"Over the summer, I'd spent a lot of time on the laptop (and then making sure to delete my search history, even though I was 99 percent sure the moms wouldn't know how to check it anyway.) Chapter 3

I already knew the word. Transgender... "Trans" is the short version, which isn't quite as cool, but it is a lot faster to type. I found out that there are a lot of trans people out there. This one website had a bunch of their life stories,

and I read them over and over again. Then I discovered more sites and blogs, and tons of videos on YouTube. It was just the best thing. I wasn't alone. -Chapter 3 (Explaining how to find adults on the internet in the trans community.)

These are chapter books located in the children's section with Beezus and Ramona by Beverly Cleary and Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by Roald Dahl. Very young children (think 3rd grade) are picking up these books independently and many of the chapter books have no indication in the description that they contain these mature themes. Many parents choose to place the family computer in a public space in the house, but that doesn't mean we don't also install a robust filter. Of course, we do have a responsibility as parents, but also, all adults have a responsibility for what they are putting in reach of children. **My favorite comment was from Christian Collins who said, "I'm baffled by... [people saying] well I have a degree in library science... I have a degree in education... Well, many people have a degree in common sense!"**

Here is what is in the new policy, in regular mom language:

- **There will be two reconsideration committees.** The *citizens* reconsideration committee does not apply to the books in the adult section. **The adult section is overseen by a separate librarian reconsideration committee.** This is a closed committee. Interestingly, nobody complained about this at all.
- **The citizens reconsideration committee** is only responsible for reviewing material in the children's section, young adult section, and the new separate parenting section containing sensitive youth materials.
- **There are two parenting sections in our libraries now.** The parenting section referred to in the new policy is not the adult parenting section that contains parenting books like baby care, discipline, gentle parenting etc. **The new parenting section is in a different area of the adult section that contains sensitive youth books that you might not want your child to pick up independently.** Children's and young adult books about sex, suicide, the death of a pet, adoption, cancer, and gender transitioning are in this section. These are all books that would have been in the children's or young adult sections except the content is sensitive. Books in this section will be restricted for checkout to adults over 18 years of age. This is the parenting section referred to in the policy.
- **Books submitted for reconsideration will be moved to the adult section until a decision has been made.** The reason why this is important is because there was a book called It's Perfectly Normal in the children's section a few years ago, and it shows drawings of naked adults in sexual positions. This book now resides in the adult section after pressure from the court.
- **You must be a resident to submit a reconsideration request.** This part was a little confusing because you do not need to submit proof of residency. **This has always been the case and has not changed from the previous policy.** The reconsideration form has a place for your residential address, and it obviously must be Montgomery County.
- **The library does allow for a book to be removed only by unanimous consent IF it meets the standards as harmful material by Texas Penal Code 43.24(a)(2).** I would honestly be surprised if we saw one book removed a year, and I don't believe any will be removed at all. **The bar is very high.**

Here is the old library policy, page 12 is where the reconsideration portion of the policy started.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/19hKIDnp8Akjjq0o5pppwK6vMVy7nREP/view?usp=sharing>

You can compare this with the new policy that can be found here:

https://destinyhosted.com/montgdocs/2024/CCREG/20240326_1490/24299%5FLibrary%5FPolicy.pdf

In conclusion, the new policy is fair and provides citizens the opportunity to have more input in what is appropriate for various age groups. The citizens will be appointed by our elected court members who are accountable to the voters. The citizens are instructed to make decisions based on our community standards. Previously, librarians were given no direction by the policy and presumably made these decisions based on their own personal views. I am proud of our elected leaders for making this courageous decision. I will close with the following comment from one of our current reconsideration committee members Ryan Hutson, "I am inspired by Judge Keough and the decision by Commissioners Court today. By giving citizens a voice in shaping the accessibility of content in our public libraries, we can strengthen our efforts to protect our children and uphold the values of our community."

Written by Michele Nuckolls, a local homeschool mom who spends a lot of time in the public library with her kids.

More information about the book reconsideration process including information on each book that was recently challenged as well as the decisions, can be found on Michele's substack at twomomsandsomebooks.substack.com