

The Honorable Tre Haggart
Secretary of State of Tennessee
312 Rosa L. Parks Avenue
Nashville, TN 37243

Subject: Letter of Concern Regarding Recent Directives to Tennessee Regional Libraries

We write to express our profound concern regarding the recent letters issued by your office to libraries in the Tennessee Regional Library System. Your demand for a full review of all materials for “age-appropriateness” within 60 days has created widespread confusion, fear, and operational disruption across the state’s public libraries. These types of reviews create immense administrative burdens for library systems and often lead to illegal censorship, which raises liability risks for local communities and the state.

Many libraries, uncertain about the legal and procedural basis for the mandate, have had to redirect limited resources, with some temporarily closing branches to complete these reviews, which are implied to be necessary for future funding. The demands in your letter need immediate clarification, as it is not reasonable to expect libraries to follow directives that would risk violating applicable law, including the U.S. Constitution.

Age-Appropriate Review Risks Book Removals That May Violate State and Federal Law.

It is illegal to remove books from public libraries because some people do not like them. This is a well-settled legal principle. Reviewing books for removal based on someone’s subjective opinion about their age-appropriateness threatens people’s First Amendment Rights. In 2025, federal courts across the country have re-affirmed this, holding that books cannot be pulled from library shelves based on vague, sweeping proclamations that impose a few people’s reading preferences on entire communities. Such behavior is censorship, and it is against the law. (See, e.g. *Fayetteville v. Crawford County*, *Penguin Random House v. Gibson*.)

Your letter does not refer to this well-established precedent. Instead, it references *Executive Order 14168*. Presidential Executive Orders are not legislation, and Congress has opted to not pursue such a bill. Executive Orders regulate federal agencies internally by directing those agencies to update their rules and policies. The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the agency that runs library grant programs, has not created regulation or policies in support of the Executive Order. Moreover, multiple courts have already questioned the constitutionality of *Executive Order 14168*. Portions have been enjoined for violating First Amendment and equal protection principles (See e.g., *San Francisco AIDS Foundation v. Trump*; *Schiff v. Office of Personnel Management*). These rulings underscore that enforcement of the Order’s anti-DEI provisions constitutes viewpoint discrimination.

Tennessee's libraries have been complying with the laws and regulations that do exist, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which requires programs like the Grants to States program to "support and expand library services" for communities of all backgrounds. Tennessee's current five-year plan complies with the anti-discrimination provisions set forth in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

Age Appropriate Review Creates Unreasonable and Costly Administrative Burdens on Municipal and Library Systems

The Secretary's letter creates an enormous administrative burden for ends that may ultimately be found unconstitutional. In this unsettled legal environment, requiring Tennessee's public libraries to conduct exhaustive content reviews not only risks violating the law but also wastes taxpayer money on unnecessary processes that may soon be invalidated.

Public library collections contain hundreds of thousands of titles. Reviewing every title requires a huge amount of resources. When an Indiana public library adopted a similar "age appropriate" review process, it was [estimated](#) that the project could cost the county's taxpayers \$300,000. If reviews result in removing library materials, and those removals violate people's constitutional rights, the costs of that liability are also high. For instance, litigation in a single county in Arkansas has [racked](#) up \$575,000 in legal fees.

The Vital Mission of Tennessee's Public Libraries

Tennessee's public libraries are steadfast guardians of the right to read, serving every member of their communities without prejudice, censorship, or fear. Content reviews create an unnecessary expenditure for ends that are likely unconstitutional. Libraries must be guided by directives that respect free speech and constitutional values. Ultimately, the call is clear: the state should support—not hinder—the fundamental freedoms of expression and access to information for all, which define a library's purpose.

We look forward to your prompt clarification so that librarians can return their full attention to their essential work: connecting Tennesseans to knowledge, culture, and one another.

[American Booksellers for Free Expression](#)

[American Library Association](#)

[Annie's Foundation](#)

[Association for Rural & Small Libraries](#)

[Authors Against Book Bans](#)

[Authors Guild](#)

[Bivins Books Publishing](#)

[Candlewick Press](#)

[Comic Book Legal Defense Fund](#)

[Defense of Democracy](#)

[Everyday Advocacy](#)

[EveryLibrary](#)

[Freedom to Read Foundation](#)

[Freedom to Read Project](#)

[GLAAD](#)

[Holiday House Books](#)

[Independent Book Publishers Association](#)

[Independent Publishers Caucus](#)

[Lambda Literary](#)

[Libro.fm](#)

[Louisiana Citizens Against Censorship](#)

[Macmillan Publishers](#)

[Military Families for Free Expression](#)

[The National Coalition Against Censorship](#)

[Peachtree Publishing Co., Inc.](#)

[PEN America](#)

[Penguin Random House](#)

[Publishing Professionals Against Book Bans](#)

[Read Freely Alabama](#)

[School Board Integrity Project](#)

[Simon & Schuster](#)

[Teaching for Change](#)

[Texas Freedom to Read Project](#)

[We Need Diverse Books](#)