



Ruth A. Bourquin
Senior & Managing Attorney
rbourquin@aclum.org
Rachel E. Davidson
Free Expression Staff Attorney
rdavidson@aclum.org
(617) 482-3170

February 20, 2024

Record Access Officer
Dr. Jay Lang, Superintendent
Chelmsford Public Schools
230 North Road
Chelmsford, MA 01824
langj@chelmsford.k12.ma.us

Dr. Jeffery Parks
Principal, McCarthy Middle School
250 North Road
Chelmsford, MA 01824
parksj@chelmsford.k12.ma.us

Re: Request for Public Records and Statement of Concern about restriction on access to books

Dear Superintendent Lang and Principal Parks:

We write on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts, Inc. (ACLUM) to request public records pursuant to the Massachusetts Public Records Law, G.L. c. 66, § 10, and also to express deep concerns about reports we have received that books available in an 8th grade classroom at McCarthy Middle School have abruptly been placed off limits to students, seemingly based on a complaint from someone about the contents of one or more books.

Any restriction on access to books raises serious legal questions of the type detailed in the letter sent last year by our office and GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD) to all school districts, which can be found here:

<https://www.aclum.org/en/press-releases/aclu-glad-urge-massachusetts-schools-reject-calls-book-bans>

In addition, the abrupt actions reportedly taken here violate the policy recommended by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees and apparently adopted by the Chelmsford School Committee, which requires a careful review process before student access to learning materials is restricted and specifically says no materials shall be restricted until that process is completed:
<https://z2policy.ctspublish.com/masc/browse/chelmsfordset/chelmsford/IJ-R>

We urge you to restore student access to this classroom library immediately.

As to public records, we seek all records created, received or in the possession of any school personnel:

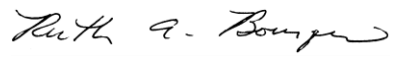
1. Discussing or related to any complaints made or received in the past 60 days about any book or books in any 8th grade classroom or classroom library at McCarthy Middle School, including without limitation records containing or describing any complaint, all communications about any complaint, all communications to any school personnel in response to or related to any complaint, information about who was involved or consulted and in what manner in deciding how to respond in light of any complaint and what input they provided, any interim or final decision about how to respond to the complaint and by whom it was made, any action taken to restrict student access to any books in any 8th grade classroom and the reasons for any such action, and further steps contemplated in response to any such complaint or action taken in response to it.
2. Discussing or related to any complaints made or received at any time in the past 12 months about any book or books in the Chelmsford School System other than those covered by item 1 above, including without limitation records about the content of any such complaints and how any such complaints were handled and resolved.
3. Discussing or related to any actions taken to restrict access to or the teaching of *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*, *Poet X* or *Long Way Down*, including the reasons for any such actions and all school district personnel involved and how in actions with regard to these books.

We ask that you prioritize the records requested in item 1 above and provide them, or as many of them as possible, even before the end of the 10 business-day deadline in the Public Records Law, given the seriousness of the reports we have received. If you claim exemption from the public records law for any records, please redact any information that you claim is subject to exemption and produce the remainder of the record, as required by law. If you claim any exemption as to any part of any record, please identify with specificity the reason for any such claim, as also required by law. As ACLUM is a non-profit organization seeking these records in the public interest, we ask that you waive any fees that might be assessed for the requested records, as authorized by law.

We look forward not only to receiving the requested records at your earliest opportunity but to learning that student access to books in the 8th grade classroom has been restored. If you wish to communicate with us about this letter, feel free to email us at the address on the first page of this letterhead.

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Sincerely,



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