November 4, 2021

To School Districts of the State of Texas:

We at the Texas Institute of Letters—the Officers, Council Members, and Members—stand against the vague, political attacks meant to intimidate school officials and librarians whose collections feature books by women, people of color, and LGBTQ writers. These attacks are preludes to book banning and censorship. Last week, Texas state representative Matt Krause launched an investigation of school districts on what types of books they have in their libraries, particularly books on race and sexuality "that might make students feel discomfort." He listed 850 books.[1] One month earlier, state representative Krause had declared his candidacy for Texas Attorney General. This week Texas Governor Greg Abbott wrote the Texas Association of School Boards that "pornographic images and substance" have no place in the Texas schools.[2] The Texas Association of School Boards has no role in approving curriculum or schoolbooks, and the governor did not list any examples of offending books. Governor Abbott is running for reelection in 2022.

These political tactics are meant to intimidate school districts, to motivate voters sympathetic to state representative Krause and Governor Abbott, and to set the groundwork for more book banning and censorship. And *who* is the target of these destructive politics? Readers in marginalized communities who suddenly see the books that inspire them and give meaning to their lives threatened with banning. Parents who understand that fostering empathy is one of the most important achievements of reading widely. Librarians, writers, and all citizens who understand that the banning of books has often led to authoritarianism that destroys freedom of thought and encourages the cruel and powerful to prey on the vulnerable. State representative Krause's list includes books on racial justice, feminism, gender identity, girls, sex and puberty, sexually transmitted diseases, Spanish-language books, Latinos and Latinas, and teen suicide.

We stand against these political attacks that seek to ban books and censor school libraries, but more importantly we *stand for*:
- *education* that expands minds and teaches critical thinking,
- *reading* freely without politicians or the government telling us what to read,
- *a sense of community* that seeks connections with those who might be different from us, rather than divisions to create a list of political enemies,
- *literature* that reaches the hearts and minds especially of young readers, many of whom are too often ignored and vilified.

Let us all stand together for the power of reading, meaningful education, and the freedom of thought captured in literature, especially from marginalized voices. From Benjamin Alire Sáenz's *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*: "Wow, a world without darkness. How beautiful was that?"

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[1]*Texas Tribune*, October 26, 2021: https://www.texastribune.org/2021/10/26/texas-school-books-race-sexuality/

[2] *Dallas Morning News*, November 1, 2021:
https://www.dallasnews.com/news/education/2021/11/01/texas-gov-abbott-wades-into-school-book-controversies/

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