

Hello again! This is Derek Firenze with your local news and commentary for Wednesday, October 23, 2024 beamed in from the *Jefferson County Beacon* for KPTZ 91.9FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

The Quilcene School Board on October 16 once again discussed a proposal to remove books from the Quilcene School District Library that include LGBTQ+ content. The discussion to ban LGBTQ books has been ongoing since it was raised at the July board meeting. The issue raised by board member Jim Hodgson concerns books purchased with a donation to the library by Olympic Pride in 2022 to buy books that give students access to stories and information that reflect LGBTQ+ identities and help them feel seen and supported.

The board approved the \$500 donation and tasked the school librarian with selecting books that fit the purpose of the donation. Hodgson, who joined the board after this decision, has been reading the books the librarian selected and would like to see them removed from the school's library because he believes they are inappropriate for school children. According to the July 17 board meeting minutes, Hodgson expressed concerns about books that bring up the topic of questioning gender to young children. School policy states that students under age 13 cannot read young adult books without written parental permission.

The timing of this discussion coincides with the passage of Washington House Bill 2331, which essentially prohibits school boards from banning books. As of June 6 of this year, under the new law any concerns or objections regarding a book or educational material must be raised in writing by a parent or legal guardian of a current district student and submitted to the school principal. The complaint will then be reviewed by the certified teacher, school principal, district superintendent, and school board, in that sequence.

If the Quilcene school board did decide to remove these books from its library, the Quilcene School District could lose a significant amount of funding from the state. In an interview with the *Beacon*, Quilcene School Board President Jim Cooke said that Hodgson's arguments maintain that he's not really banning the books, because they're still accessible to the students through the District Library organization.

Regardless of the semantics of book banning versus relocation to a different library, many people are upset by the potential removal of books serving a protected class of students. Around 70 people showed up to the October 16 school board meeting, with 30 submitting public comments protesting the ban.

Tamara R. Rotz, director of the Jefferson County Library District, highlighted the role of librarians and the board in a statement sent to the *Beacon* where she noted that attacks on school libraries are nothing new. In her more than 20-year career, Rotz said she's seen this situation play out repeatedly in many states and communities, inevitably leading to community division, including parents exhausted from fighting discrimination and school staff leaving the district, followed by greater difficulty recruiting new staff. She also made clear that if lawsuits are filed, it could cost the district significantly.

Rotz went on to note that these types of challenges often succeed in raising the level of vitriol and discrimination, even if they start from fear of societal change, not from hatred and anger. She said, "It is very difficult to shift peoples' perspectives while in a fear state. Instead, energy is best focused on establishing and enforcing clear policies that align with state and federal laws to prevent the fears of a few loud voices from negatively impacting the community, schools, and others."

The board could not agree on the book banning resolution during the October 16 meeting, though they plan to discuss the proposal further after seeking legal advice. The resolution will be on the agenda at the board's work-study meeting on November 6 and the next public board meeting will be November 18 at 6pm.

Also in this week's edition of the *Beacon*, editor Nhatt Nichols spoke with author Margaret Killjoy about her new book, *The Sapling Cage*, a tale of earth magic, power struggle, and self-invention in an own-voices story of trans witchcraft which she'll be reading from at the Gray Coast Guildhall in Quilcene on Sunday, October 27 at 7pm. While their conversation was filled with insights, perhaps the most timely was Killjoy's statement, "Being afraid of books is just abject cowardice."

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturdays, partnering on Wednesday to bring you stories from jeffcobeacon.com. You can submit ideas to the *Beacon* through info@jeffcobeacon.com. This is Derek Firenze. Thanks for listening.