

B.2.1.6

(Old 53.1.6)

At the 2014 ALA Annual Conference, based on recommendation by the Committee on Intellectual Freedom, the ALA Council adopted a revision to text of ALA Policy **B.2.1.6 Restricted Access to Library Materials: An Interpretation of the *Library Bills of Right*** (Old Number 53.1.6)

At the 2015 ALA Midwinter Meeting, the Policy Monitoring Committee (PMC), noted in its report to Council that interpretations are traditionally represented in the *ALA Policy Manual* by means of an abstract, followed by a reference to the Policy Reference File, where the full text of the Interpretations reside. In these cases the latest date of revisions and the parenthetical statements will be updated to reflect the new revision date, and the new existing text of the abstract.

The following abstract was created by the Committee on Intellectual Freedom for incorporated into the *ALA Manual Policy* as follows:

B.2.1.6 Restricted Access to Library Materials: An Interpretation of the *Library Bills of Rights* (Old Number 53.1.6)

Physical restrictions and content filtering of library resources and services may generate psychological, service, or language skills barriers to access as well. Because restricted materials often deal with controversial, unusual, or sensitive subjects, having to ask a library worker for access to them may be embarrassing or inhibiting for patrons desiring access. Even when a title is listed in the catalog with a reference to its restricted status, a barrier is placed between the patron and the publication. (See also “Labeling and Rating Systems.”) Because restricted materials often feature information that some people consider objectionable, potential library users may be predisposed to think of labeled and filtered resources as objectionable and be discouraged from asking for access to them. Adopted 1973, amended 1981, 1991, 2000, 2004, 2014.

(See “Policy Reference File”: Restricted Access to Library Materials: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*: 2013-2014 ALA CD#19.16_63014_act – PDF, 12 pgs)

Restricted Access to Library Materials
An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*

Libraries are a traditional forum for the open exchange of information. Restricting access to library materials violates the basic tenets of the American Library Association's *Library Bill of Rights*.

Some libraries block access to certain materials by placing physical or virtual barriers between the user and those materials. For example, materials are sometimes labeled for content or placed in a "locked case," "adults only," "restricted shelf," or "high-demand" collection. Access to certain materials is sometimes restricted to protect them from theft or mutilation, or because of statutory authority or institutional mandate.

In some libraries, access is restricted based on computerized reading management programs that assign reading levels to books and/or users and limit choices to titles on the program's reading list. Titles not on the reading management list have been removed from the collection in some school libraries. Organizing collections by reading management program level, ability, grade, or age level is another example of restricted access. Even though the chronological age or grade level of users is not representative of their information needs or total reading abilities, users may feel inhibited from selecting resources located in areas that do not correspond to their assigned characteristics.

Physical restrictions and content filtering of library resources and services may generate psychological, service, or language skills barriers to access as well. Because restricted materials often deal with controversial, unusual, or sensitive subjects, having to ask a library worker for access to them may be embarrassing or inhibiting for patrons desiring access. Even when a title is listed in the catalog with a reference to its restricted status, a barrier is placed between the patron and the publication. (See also "Labeling and Rating Systems.") Because restricted materials often feature information that some people consider objectionable, potential library users may be predisposed to think of labeled and filtered resources as objectionable and be discouraged from asking for access to them.

Federal and some state statutes require libraries that accept specific types of federal and/or state funding to install content filters that limit access to internet resources for minors and adults. Internet filter are applied to internet resources in some libraries may prevent users from finding targeted categories of information, much of which is constitutionally protected. The use of internet filters must be addressed through library policies and procedures to ensure that users receive information and that filters do not prevent users from exercising their First Amendment rights. Users have the right to unfiltered access to constitutionally protected information. (See also "Access to Digital Information, Services, and Networks.")

Library policies that restrict access to resources for any reason must be carefully formulated and administered to ensure they do not violate established principles of intellectual freedom. This caution is reflected in ALA policies, such as "Evaluating Library Collections," "Free Access to Libraries for Minors," "Preservation Policy," and the ACRL "Code of Ethics for Special Collections Librarians."

Donated resources require special consideration. In keeping with the "Joint Statement on Access" of the American Library Association and Society of American Archivists, libraries should avoid accepting donor agreements or entering into contracts that impose permanent restrictions on special collections. As stated in the "Joint Statement on Access," it is the responsibility of a library with such collections "to make available original research materials in its possession on equal terms of access."

A primary goal of the library profession is to facilitate access to all points of view on current and historical issues. All proposals for restricted access should be carefully scrutinized to ensure that the purpose is not to suppress a viewpoint or to place a barrier between users and content. Libraries must maintain policies and procedures that serve the diverse needs of their users and protect the First Amendment right to receive information.

Adopted February 2, 1973, by the ALA Council; amended July 1, 1981; July 3, 1991; July 12, 2000; June 30, 2004; January 28, 2009; and July 1, 2014.

RESTRICTED ACCESS TO LIBRARY MATERIALS

An Interpretation of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

Libraries are a traditional forum for the open exchange of information. Attempts to restrict access to library materials violate the basic tenets of the *Library Bill of Rights*.

Some libraries place materials in a "closed shelf," "locked case," "adults only," "restricted shelf," or "high-demand" collection. Some libraries have applied filtering software to their Internet stations to prevent users from finding targeted categories of information, much of which is constitutionally protected. Some libraries block access to certain materials by placing other barriers between the user and those materials.

Because restricted materials often deal with controversial, unusual, or sensitive subjects, having to ask a librarian or circulation clerk for access to them may be embarrassing or inhibiting for patrons desiring the materials. Requiring a user to ask for materials may create a service barrier or pose a language-skills barrier. Even when a title is listed in the catalog with a reference to its restricted status, a barrier is placed between the patron and the publication. (See also "Labels and Rating Systems.") Because restricted materials often feature information that some people consider objectionable, potential library users may be predisposed to think of the materials as objectionable and, therefore, be reluctant to ask for access to them.

Limiting access by relegating materials into physically or virtually restricted or segregated collections or restricting materials by creating age-related, linguistic, economic, psychological, or other barriers violates the *Library Bill of Rights*. However, some libraries have established restrictive policies to protect their materials from theft or mutilation, or because of statutory authority or institutional mandate. Such policies must be carefully formulated and administered to ensure they do not violate established principles of intellectual freedom. This caution is reflected in ALA policies, such as "Evaluating Library Collections," "Free Access to Libraries for Minors," "Preservation Policy," and the ACRL "Code of Ethics for Special Collections Librarians."

In keeping with the "Joint Statement on Access" of the American Library Association and Society of American Archivists, libraries should avoid accepting donor agreements or entering into contracts that impose permanent restrictions on special collections. As stated in the "Joint Statement," it is the responsibility of libraries with such collections "to make available original research materials in its possession on equal terms of access."

All proposals for restricted access collections should be carefully scrutinized to ensure that the purpose is not to suppress a viewpoint or to place a barrier between certain patrons and particular content. A primary goal of the library profession is to facilitate access to all points of view on current and historical issues.

Adopted February 2, 1973; amended July 1, 1981; July 3, 1991; July 12, 2000; June 30, 2004, by the ALA Council.

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RESTRICTED ACCESS TO LIBRARY MATERIALS
working draft; do not quote for publication
An Interpretation of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

Libraries are a traditional forum for the open exchange of information. Attempts to restrict access to library materials violate the basic tenets of the *Library Bill of Rights*.

Historically, attempts have been made to limit access by relegating materials into segregated collections. These attempts are in violation of established policy. Such collections are often referred to by a variety of names, including "closed shelf," "locked case," "adults only," "restricted shelf," or "high demand." Access to some materials also may require a monetary fee or financial deposit. [More recently, some libraries have applied filtering software to their Internet stations that prevent users from finding targeted categories of information, much of which is constitutionally protected.] In any situation which restricts access to certain materials, a barrier is placed between the patron and those materials. That barrier may be age related, linguistic, economic, or psychological in nature.

Because ~~materials placed in restricted collections~~ [restricted materials] often deal with controversial, unusual, or "sensitive" subjects, having to ask a librarian or circulation clerk for [access to] them may be embarrassing or inhibiting for patrons desiring the materials. Needing to ask for materials may pose a language barrier or a staff service barrier. Because ~~restricted collections~~ [materials] often are ~~composed of materials~~ [feature information] which [that] some library patrons consider "objectionable," the potential user may be predisposed to think of the materials as "objectionable" and, therefore, are reluctant to ask for [access to] them.

Barriers between the materials and the patron which are psychological, or are affected by language skills, are nonetheless limitations on access to information. Even when a title is listed in the catalog with a reference to its restricted status, a barrier is placed between the patron and the publication (see also *Statement on Labeling*).

There may be, however, countervailing factors to establish policies to protect library materials—specifically, for reasons of physical preservation including protection from theft or mutilation. Any such policies must be carefully formulated and administered with extreme attention to the principles of intellectual freedom. This caution is also in keeping with ALA policies, such as *Evaluating Library Collections*, *Free Access to Libraries for Minors*, and the *Preservation Policy*.

Finally, in keeping with the *Joint Statement on Access* of the American Library Association and Society of American Archivists, restrictions that result from donor agreements or contracts for special collections materials must be similarly circumscribed. Permanent exclusions are not acceptable. The overriding impetus must be to work for free and unfettered access to all documentary heritage.

Adopted February 2, 1973; amended July 1, 1981; July 3, 1991, by the ALA Council.

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Restricted Access to Library Materials
An Interpretation of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

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Historically, attempts have been made to limit access by relegating materials into segregated collections. These attempts are in violation of established policy. Such collections are often referred to by a variety of names, including "closed shelf," "locked case," "adults only," "restricted shelf," or "high demand." Access to some materials also may require a monetary fee or financial deposit. In any situation which restricts access to certain materials, a barrier is placed between the patron and those materials. That barrier may be age related, linguistic, economic, or psychological in nature.

Because materials placed in restricted collections often deal with controversial, unusual, or "sensitive" subjects, having to ask a librarian or circulation clerk for them may be embarrassing or inhibiting for patrons desiring the materials. Needing to ask for materials may pose a language barrier or a staff service barrier. Because restricted collections often are composed of materials which some library patrons consider "objectionable," the potential user may be predisposed to think of the materials as "objectionable" and, therefore, are reluctant to ask for them.

Barriers between the materials and the patron which are psychological, or are affected by language skills, are nonetheless limitations on access to information. Even when a title is listed in the catalog with a reference to its restricted status, a barrier is placed between the patron and the publication (see also "Statement on Labeling").

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Adopted by the Intellectual Freedom Committee
July 1, 1991

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ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES AFFECTING ACCESS TO
LIBRARY RESOURCES AND SERVICES

An Interpretation of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

The right of free access to information for all individuals is basic to all aspects of library service regardless of type of library. Article 5 of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS protects the rights of an individual to use a library regardless of origin, age, background, or views. The central thrust of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS is to protect and encourage the free flow of information and ideas. The American Library Association urges that all libraries set policies and procedures that reflect the basic tenets of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS.

Many libraries have adopted administrative policies and procedures regulating access to resources, services, and facilities, i.e., specific collections, reference services, interlibrary loan, programming, meeting rooms, exhibit space. Such policies and procedures governing the order and protection of library materials and facilities, and the planning of library programs and exhibits, could become a convenient means for removing or restricting access to controversial materials, limiting access to programs or exhibits, or for discriminating against specific groups of library patrons. Such abuse of administrative procedures and policies is in opposition to the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS.

The American Library Association recommends that all libraries with rare or special collections formulate policies and procedures for such collections so as not to restrict access and use due to age or the nature of the patron interest in the materials. Restricted access to such collections is solely for the protection of the materials, and must in no way limit access to the information and ideas contained in the materials.

The Model Interlibrary Loan Code of the American Library Association recommends that all library patrons be eligible for interlibrary loan, in accordance with Article 5 of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS and the statement FREE ACCESS TO LIBRARIES FOR MINORS. The Model Interlibrary Loan Code states the importance of considering the needs and interests of all users, including children and young adults. Borrowing libraries should provide the resources to meet the ordinary needs of all of its primary clientele, and any members of its clientele should be eligible for interlibrary loan. When libraries adhere to the Model Interlibrary Loan Code, access to information is protected.

Library administrative policies should examine all restrictions to resources or services associated with age, as all are violations of Article 5 of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS and the statement on restricted access to library materials. For example, privileges associated with library cards should be consistent for all library users, no matter what the age. Library policies in which certain patrons, usually minors,

are denied library privileges available to other library patrons are not endorsed by the American Library Association, as they violate Article 5 of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS, as well as the statement on FREE ACCESS TO LIBRARIES FOR MINORS. It is parents and only parents who may restrict their children--and only their children--from access to library materials and services.

Reference service policies and procedures, such as library policies limiting the time spent on answering telephone reference questions, should provide for equitable service to all library patrons, regardless of age or type of question. These policies must apply to both adult and child patrons.

Policies governing the use of meeting rooms and exhibits should be examined to ensure that minors are not excluded from a program of interest to them based on age. Meeting rooms and exhibit spaces should also be available on an "equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use," and should not be denied to anyone based solely on age.

Policies should reflect that a person's right to attend a library initiated program "should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views," as stated in LIBRARY INITIATED PROGRAMS AS A RESOURCE, an Interpretation of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS.

Adopted January 27, 1982 by the ALA Council.

RESTRICTED ACCESS TO LIBRARY MATERIALS

An Interpretation of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

Restricting access of certain titles and classes of library materials is a practice common to many libraries in the United States. Collections of these materials are referred to by a variety of names such as "closed shelf," "locked case," "adults only," or "restricted shelf."

Three reasons generally advanced to justify restricted access are:

- (1) It provides a refuge for materials that belong in the collection but which may be considered "objectionable" by some library patrons;
- (2) It provides a means for controlling distribution of materials to those who are allegedly not "prepared" for such materials, or who have been labeled less responsible, because of experience, education, or age;
- (3) It provides a means to protect certain materials from theft and mutilation.

Restricted access to library materials is frequently in opposition to the principles of intellectual freedom. While the limitation differs from direct censorship activities, such as removal of library materials or refusal to purchase certain publications, it nonetheless constitutes censorship, albeit in a subtle form. Restricted access often violates the spirit of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS in the following ways:

- (1) It violates that portion of Article 2 which states that ". . . no library materials should be proscribed . . . because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval."

"Materials . . . proscribed" as used in Article 2 includes "suppressed" materials. Restricted access achieves de facto suppression of certain materials.

Even when a title is listed in the catalog with a reference to its restricted status, a barrier is placed between the patron and the publication. Because a majority of materials placed in restricted collections deal with controversial, unusual, or "sensitive" subjects, asking a librarian or circulation clerk for them may be embarrassing for patrons desiring the materials. Because restricted collections are

often composed of materials which some library patrons consider "objectionable," the potential user is predisposed to thinking of the materials as "objectionable," and may be reluctant to ask for them. Although the barrier between the materials and the patron is psychological, it is nonetheless a limitation on access to information.

- (2) It violates Article 5, which states that, "A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of . . . age. . . ."

Limiting access of certain materials only to adults abridges the use of the library for minors. Access to library materials is an integral part of the right to use a library. Such restrictions are generally instituted under the assumption that certain materials are "harmful" to minors, or in an effort to avoid controversy with adults who might think so.

Libraries and library boards who would restrict the availability of materials to minors because of actual or anticipated parental objection should bear in mind that they do not serve in loco parentis. The American Library Association holds that it is parents -- and only parents -- who may restrict their children -- and only their children -- from access to library materials and services. Parents who would rather their children not have access to certain materials should so advise their children.

When restricted access is implemented solely to protect materials from theft or mutilation, the practice may be legitimate. However, segregation of materials to protect them must be administered with extreme attention to the reason for restricting access. Too often only "controversial" materials are the subject of such segregation, indicating that factors other than theft and mutilation -- including content -- were the true considerations. When loss rates of items popular with young people are high, this cannot justify the labeling of all minors as irresponsible and the adoption of prejudiced restrictions on the right of minors to use library services and materials.

Selection policies, carefully developed to include principles of intellectual freedom and the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS, should not be vitiated by administrative practices such as restricted access.

*See also FREE ACCESS TO LIBRARIES FOR MINORS, adopted June 30, 1972; amended July 1, 1981, by the ALA Council.

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AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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RESTRICTED ACCESS TO LIBRARY MATERIALS

An interpretation of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

Restricting access of certain titles and certain classes of library materials is a practice common to many libraries in the United States. Collections of these materials are referred to by a variety of names such as "closed shelf," "locked case," "adults only," or "restricted shelf" collections.

Three reasons generally advanced to justify restricted access are: (1) It provides a refuge for materials that belong in the collection but which may be considered "objectionable" by some library patrons; (2) It provides a means for controlling distribution of materials which allegedly should not be read by those who are not "prepared" for such materials by experience, education, or age; (3) It provides a means to protect certain materials from theft and mutilation.

Though widely used - and often practical - restricted access to library materials is frequently in opposition to the principles of intellectual freedom. While the limitation differs from direct censorship activities, such as removal of library materials or refusal to purchase certain publications, it nonetheless constitutes censorship, albeit a subtle form. As a form of censorship, restricted access violates the spirit of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS in the following ways:

- (1) It violates that portion of Article II which states that "...no library materials should be proscribed... because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval."

The word "proscribed," as used in Article II, means "suppressed." Restricted access achieves de facto suppression of certain materials.

Even when a title is listed in the card catalog with a reference to its restricted shelf status, a barrier is placed between the patron and the publication. Because a majority of materials placed in restricted collections deal with controversial, unusual, or "sensitive" subjects, asking a librarian or circulation clerk for them is an embarrassment for patrons desiring the materials. Because restricted collections are often composed of materials which some library patrons consider "objectionable," the potential user is predisposed to thinking of the materials as "objectionable," and is accordingly inhibited from specifically asking for them. Although the barrier between the materials and the patron is psychological, it is nonetheless a tangible limitation on his access to information.

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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- (2) It violates Article V which states that, "The rights of an individual to the use of a library should not be denied or abridged because of his age...."

Limiting access of certain materials to adults only abridges the use of the library for minors. "Use of the library," includes use of, and access to, library materials. Such restrictions are generally instituted under the assumption that certain materials are "harmful" to minors, or in an effort to avoid controversy with parents who might think so.

The librarian who would restrict the availability of materials to minors because of actual or suspected parental objection should bear in mind that he is not in loco parentis in his position as librarian. The American Library Association holds that it is the parent - and only the parent - who may restrict his children - and only his children - in reading matter. The parent who would rather his child did not read certain materials or certain kinds of materials should so advise the child.*

When restricted access is implemented to protect materials from theft or mutilation, the use of the practice may be legitimate. However, segregation of materials to protect them must be administered with extreme attention to the rationale for restricting access. Too often only "controversial" materials are the subject of such segregation, leading to the conclusion that factors other than theft and mutilation were the true considerations. The distinction is extremely difficult to make, both for the librarian and the patron.

Selection policies, carefully developed on the basis of principles of intellectual freedom and the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS, should not be vitiated by administrative practices such as restricted access.

*See also FREE ACCESS TO LIBRARIES FOR MINORS, adopted by the ALA Council, June 30, 1972.