RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

LIBRARY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation Number: 20260623-04: Book Safe Harbor

Date of Approval: June 29, 2026

Recommendation:

Designate the City of Austin as a Book Safe Harbor.

Description of Recommendation to Council:

Requesting that the Austin City Council adopt a resolution that designates the City of Austin as a Book Safe Harbor reaffirming and expanding the previously adopted Freedom to Read Resolution (Resolution Number 20220901-086).

Rationale:

Background

Across the country and in the State of Texas, libraries are confronting aggressive challenges to materials in their collections. School libraries have been the primary target of these incidents.[1] While public libraries are a lesser target, these challenges are occurring there, too.[2] [3]

Since 2021, the State of Texas has passed several bills to restrict public access to books.[4] [5] Challenges and complaints often cite explicit content, issues around race, gender identity and sexuality, and sex education.[6]

We continue to believe it is a core mission of the public library to provide quality information from diverse viewpoints, especially on these kinds of topics. We also continue to believe that book bans and these undue challenges are attacks on open access and free inquiry, which are essential to our democracy.[7]

On April 18, 2022, the City of Austin Library Commission sent a recommendation to City Council to support and protect the "Freedom to Read" as a result of the numerous challenges to the access of literature and library materials [8], resulting in *Resolution 20220901-086*.[9] With sustained efforts at local, state, and national levels to ban access to literature and educational material, the nationwide *Book Safe Harbor* movement (also known as the *Book Sanctuary* movement) has emerged to protect access to information and literature. A book safe harbor provides unwavering support and protection for the freedom to read.[10] Becoming a book safe harbor means a city is dedicated to protecting books and resources (physical or digital) that are endangered, challenged, or banned. This movement has championed the right to read all books, without censorship or limitation to access. Successful designations in the State of Texas include the Harris County Library System. [11] [12]

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The "Freedom to Read" is a constitutional right[13] that should continue to be protected and reinforced by the City's status as a *Book Safe Harbor* should undue challenges arise at the Austin Public Library. This designation aligns with the public, as 71% of Americans oppose book bans.[14]

All patrons of the Austin Public Library in good standing are able to request a reconsideration of materials provided by the Library. The Austin Public Library has established a rigorous reconsideration process to thoroughly evaluate reconsideration requests.[15]

Library Commission Action

The Austin Library Commission wants to take steps to ensure public access to library materials is not hampered by such challenges, should one arise.

At the April 27, 2026, regular commission meeting of the Austin Library Commission, we received a presentation from *Authors Against Banned Books* and the Austin Library Foundation advocating for the continued need to resist banning and censoring the resources available to the public from the Austin Public Library System.[11]

At the May 18, 2026, regular commission meeting, we received briefings from APL staff on the reconsideration policies and processes for material that is challenged by the public. Additionally, the presentation covered APL's efforts around *National Banned Book Week* as a way to promote free access to knowledge through Library materials.[15]

Statements of support from the Commission and a designation from the City Council are valuable because they send a strong message about our community's values. They also signal to APL staff that we appreciate their efforts when confronting these difficult issues, respect the professionalism of APL librarians and staff, and support the APL policies for handling such challenges.[16]

Commission Recommendation to Council

Having previously adopted a Library Commission recommendation in support of the "Freedom to Read"[8], as well as a City Council Resolution[9], and in honor of Austin Public Library's Century of Service and its 2026 Centennial, recognizing also the Library's continued commitment to serving future generations, the Commission recommends that the Austin City Council draft an ordinance to explicitly include principles of the library, including protecting intellectual freedom, open access and a collection that serves every reader to designate Austin as a Book Safe Harbor.

Motioned By: Seconded By:

Vote:

For:

Against:

Abstain:

Off the dais:

Absent:

Attest:

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1 "Schools nationwide are quietly removing books from their libraries", *Washington Post*, published Mar 22, 2022, accessed May 28, 2026, https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/03/22/school-librarian-book-bans-challenges/

2 "Censorship battles' new frontier: Your public library," *Washington Post*, published Apr 17, 2022, accessed May 28, 2026, https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/04/17/public-libraries-books-censorship/

3 "How the library wars have played out in one Texas county," *AXIOS Austin*, published March 14, 2022, https://www.axios.com/local/austin/2022/03/24/library-books-wars-texas-llano-county-censorship

4 "HB 900 Implementation," *Texas Library Association*, accessed May 15, 2026, https://txla.org/advocacy/hb-900-vendor-ratings-for-school-library-materials/hb-900-implementation/

5 "Senate Bill 13 Requirements Related to School Library Materials," *Texas Education Agency*, published August 28, 2025, accessed May 1, 2026, https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/news-and-multimedia/correspondence/taa-letters/senate-bill-13-requirements-related-to-school-library-materials

6 Martin Davies, David, "How Texas is the epicenter of book banning", *Texas Public Radio*, published October 13, 2025, accessed May 28, 2026, https://www.tpr.org/podcast/the-source/2025-10-13/how-texas-is-the-epicenter-of-book-banning

7" About Banned & Challenged Books", *American Library Association*, accessed May 28, 2026, https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/aboutbannedbooks

8 "Freedom to Read Resolution," *Austin Library Commission*, April 18, 2022, accessed May 15, 2026, https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=383685

9 Resolution No. 2020901-86, *Austin City Council*, September 1, 2022, accessed May 15, 2026, https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=392926

10 "Book Sanctuaries: Committed to Protecting Banned and Challenged Books", Chicago Public Library, September 21, 2022, accessed May 1, 2026, https://www.chipublib.org/news/book-sanctuaries-committed-to-protecting-banned-and-challenge-books/

11 Garton Scanlon, Liz and Tim Stanley, "Austin as a Book Safe Harbor: Honoring Where We've Come From, Where We're Going and What We Stand For," *Austin Library Commission*, presented April 27, 2026, accessed May 15, 2026, https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=472507

12 "People are supporting 'book sanctuaries' despite politics: 'No one wants to be censored'," *USA Today*, September 27, 2024, accessed May 15, 2026, https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/books/2024/09/27/book-bans-book-sanctuary/75400509007/

13 "The Freedom to Read Statement", *American Library Association*, last updated Jun 30, 2004, accessed May 15, 2022, https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/freedomreadstatement

14 "Voters Oppose Book Bans in Libraries", *American Library Association*, March 21, 2022, accessed June 1, 2026, https://www.ala.org/advocacy/voters-oppose-book-bans-libraries

15 "Materials Reconsideration Process", *Austin Public Library*, presented May 18, 2026, https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=474756

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16 “Austin Public Library Statement on Book Banning and Library Censorship,” *Austin Public Library*, released December 27, 2021, accessed June 1, 2026, https://library.austintexas.gov/news/austin-public-library-statement-book

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