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ALA American Library Association

Committee on Professional Ethics and Intellectual Freedom Committee

May 14, 2020

ALA Committee on Organization
Chair, James G. Neal

Dear Chairperson Neal and members of ALA's Committee on Organization:

We are writing to express concern about the lack of a standing committee to address issues and topics of importance involving professional ethics, intellectual freedom, and privacy in the Forward Together recommendations. As we understand it, the Forward Together proposal is now being reviewed by the Committee on Organization (COO), as the Steering Committee on Organizational Effectiveness (SCOE) has finished its work with its final report.

At the outset of this tremendous and complex task, SCOE was charged, in part, to “embrace the Association’s core values.” In the proposed new leadership structure for ALA, there is not a clear and discernible path to ensure that core professional library values, such as Intellectual Freedom, Professional Ethics, and Privacy, have a consistent voice and seat at the table in order to inform the association’s mission and practice. Many members of the Committee on Professional Ethics, Intellectual Freedom Committee and its Privacy Subcommittee, and Intellectual Freedom Round Table have expressed concerns that such a decision suggests that professional values are no longer viewed as a core value or core function of the Association or the library profession.

We respectfully propose the addition of a seventh standing committee to the Forward Together recommendations—Professional Values. The Professional Values Standing Committee would be the arm of the new ALA leadership structure that would focus on Intellectual Freedom, Professional Ethics, and Privacy. It would combine the work of the Intellectual Freedom Committee, Committee on Professional Ethics, and IFC Privacy Subcommittee and align with ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom.

The work these committees do is important. They monitor and respond to ongoing intellectual freedom and privacy developments in libraries, including technology, politics, legislation, and social trends. They also ensure that the association’s statements concerning intellectual freedom, privacy, and ethics remain current and responsive to the needs of the profession. For example, within the past year, the Library Bill of Rights, one of our profession’s most important statements of our core values, was amended to include a new article that codifies Privacy as a core right. ALA’s Code of Ethics was also re-evaluated, a regular practice that ensures our values remain grounded in the experiences of libraries and library workers. The Forward Together leadership structure gives no clear direction of how this work would get done or who will be charged with the responsibility for these foundational documents, along with their various interpretations and accompanying documents, that guide the practices of library workers.

Hot-button issues for libraries that generate media attention and social media debates seem more often than not to involve intellectual freedom issues. Recent examples include anti-transgender rights groups

using public library meeting rooms, controversies involving drag queen storytimes, facial recognition technology being implemented in schools, and legislation designed to impair library workers' ability to develop diverse collections and allow the censorship of library collections and programs. For ALA leadership to best be prepared to mobilize and respond to such issues effectively, there should be a standing committee to ensure expertise in intellectual freedom issues within the ALA leadership structure.

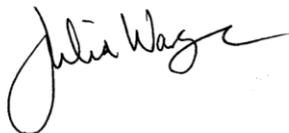
We recognize the need for change in ALA governance structure and appreciate the amount of time, energy, and thought that SCOE has put into its recommendations and that COO is currently undertaking. Aligning ALA structures and reducing the financial footprint will allow leaders to implement a vision for a reimagined association as outlined in the Code of Ethics of the American Library Association to "strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession." As we move forward together through this process, we must also endeavor to "treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness, and good faith." It is within this spirit that we make this proposal to ensure that intellectual freedom, privacy, and ethics remain a vital part of ALA and our profession.

Thank you for all of your hard work and efforts, and for considering our proposal.

Sincerely,



Andrew Harant
Chair, Committee on Professional Ethics



Julia Warga
Chair, Intellectual Freedom Committee

Cc: Wanda Brown, ALA President
Julius Jefferson, ALA President-Elect
Patty Wong, incoming ALA President-Elect
Tracie Hall, ALA Executive Director
ALA Executive Board
ALA Committee on Professional Ethics
ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee