

**NATIONAL
COALITION
AGAINST
CENSORSHIP** **KIDS'
RIGHT
TO READ**

September 28, 2021

Board of Education
Lake Travis Independent School District
3322 Ranch Road 620 South
Austin, TX 78738

Re: Removal of *Out of Darkness* from school libraries

Dear Board members:

The National Coalition Against Censorship is a coalition of national nonprofit groups dedicated to protecting the First Amendment rights of K-12 students, teachers, and staff. We are writing regarding a news report indicating that *Out of Darkness* by Ashley Hope Pérez was removed from school libraries after some community members objected to some of the content of that book.

While it is true that the District is ultimately entitled to determine what materials are used in its classrooms, it is also true that there is a constant risk that such decisions might be influenced by improper factors, such as political considerations or hostility to the viewpoints expressed in curricular materials. That is presumably why the District has promulgated very specific policies and regulations governing the selection of materials as well as the adjudication of challenges to those materials.

We are concerned about the removal of *Out of Darkness* because news reports cite a district spokesperson as stating that the book has been removed before the reconsideration process has even begun, despite the fact that District Policy EF(Local) explicitly states: "Access to a challenged resource shall not be restricted during the reconsideration process, except the District may deny access to a child if requested by the child's parent."

Thus, it appears that the district has ignored its regulations by removing the book from the school libraries. Removing a book without following administrative regulations is not only illegal, it also raises serious pedagogical concerns. Teachers who fear that books might summarily be removed whenever someone brings a challenge will be reluctant to assign any but the most innocuous and unchallenging books, and hence likely to chill their willingness to select books that they believe best serve students' needs.

Therefore, we ask that the District return *Out of Darkness* to the library shelves until the challenge has been adjudicated, and to clarify to all teachers, administrators and staff that administrative regulations must be followed when challenges are brought to curricular materials.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Finan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

Co-signed by: The Authors' Guild
National Council of Teachers of English
PEN America
PEN America Children's and Young Adult Books Committee
Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

CC: Paul Norton, Superintendent

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