



128 Dorrance Street, Suite 400
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 831-7171
Fax: (401) 831-7175
www.riaclu.org
info@riaclu.org

September 19, 2022

Edward Garcia, Director
Cranston Public Library
140 Sockanosset Cross Road
Cranston, RI 02920

VIA EMAIL

Dear Mr. Garcia:

I am writing in response to the controversy that has arisen over the Cranston Public Library's rental of space this evening to a group holding a "gender ideology" panel discussion at the William Hall Branch. We have read the statement that the library has issued in response to calls from some to cancel the event because of its offensive transphobic content, and I wanted to let you know that the ACLU of Rhode Island fully supports the library's position allowing the event to proceed.

Your statement properly notes that serious First Amendment concerns would be raised by denying an individual or organization the ability to use library meeting space solely because of the content of their views. Taking such an action would also seem to run counter to a library's basic mission, and would be especially troubling at a time when libraries themselves are facing concerted efforts by outside groups to censor certain books – including books on this very subject – based on their content. The message of this group deserves condemnation, but silencing their speech is, ultimately, a dangerous and counter-productive way to respond.

As U.S. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. wrote almost a century ago: "If there is any principle of the Constitution that more imperatively calls for attachment than any other, it is the principle of free thought—not free thought for those who agree with us but freedom for the thought that we hate."

One can only hope that some of the individuals taking advantage of their First Amendment right to use the library space tonight and to listen to the discriminatory views being presented will recognize the hypocrisy of simultaneously attempting to censor the First Amendment rights of others to access LGBTQ-positive books.

I hope you will feel free to share this letter of support with others in the library system involved in this decision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven Brown". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Steven Brown
Executive Director

cc: Robin Nyzio, William Hall Branch
Rachael Juskuy, RILA President
Tayla Cardillo, RILA Intellectual Freedom Committee