

Alamance County Public Library

Content Notice Review Policy

Effective Date

April 21, 2025

Approved by

Alamance County Board of Commissioners

I. Purpose

The Alamance County Public Library is committed to supporting informed choice and parental engagement while maintaining full access to a broad and diverse collection. To assist families in identifying materials they may wish to preview, the Library may apply a neutral content notice sticker to select juvenile and teen materials.

This policy establishes a structured process for patrons to request a review of materials and for the Library to evaluate the content using objective, viewpoint-neutral criteria.

II. Definitions

- "Juvenile" and "Teen" materials: Items cataloged for youth and young adult audiences as defined by the Library's collection classification system.
- "Content Indicator": A specific, verifiable element of the material (e.g., depiction of violence, substance use, strong language) that may be evaluated during review.
- "Sticker": A neutral, informational label applied to an item to prompt catalog-based content review by patrons.

III. Sticker Description

When approved, the following sticker may be applied to the spine of a book:

"Parental Guidance Suggested - See catalog for details."

This sticker directs patrons to the library's catalog, where a factual and brief content note may be provided. The sticker is intended solely as an informational aid, not as a warning, restriction, or judgment. It does not constitute an official rating, age restriction, or endorsement of content suitability by the Library. It does not alter circulation procedures or prompt staff to intervene, monitor, or advise based on content or patron age.

IV. Request Procedure

Library cardholders or local residents may initiate a review by submitting a Content Notice Review Request Form to the Library Director. Forms are available at all library branches and online.

Requestors must:

- Identify the item by title, author, and call number
- Indicate what portion(s) of the material were reviewed
- Identify one or more specific content indicators, including page references where possible

Eligible indicators include:

- Graphic violence
- Explicit sexual content or references
- Substance use (e.g., drugs, alcohol, tobacco)
- Self-harm or suicidal themes
- Profanity or strong language

The Library will not actively monitor or review materials absent a formal request. Materials are not subject to sticker review based solely on staff initiative or community reputation.

The Library reserves the right to consider other objectively verifiable content factors in rare cases where they are analogous to the listed indicators and relevant to age-appropriateness.

V. Review Process

1. Initial Screening

The Library Director or designee will confirm the request is complete and within the scope of this policy (juvenile or teen materials only).

2. Committee Review

A review committee will consist of the Library Director, members of the Library Leadership Team, and the Standards Management and Advocacy Resource Team (S.M.A.R.T.). The committee will:

- Review the material in full or in part as needed
- Verify the presence of content indicators
- Determine if the material meets the threshold for a sticker, based solely on the presence and factual portrayal of content indicators, not on thematic interpretation, perceived moral value, or potential disagreement with the ideas expressed in the material

- Apply content indicators in a consistent and viewpoint-neutral manner, regardless of the material's author, topic, cultural context, or political, social, or religious perspective
- Record all votes taken by the committee as part of the internal documentation of the decision

3. Catalog Entry

If a sticker is applied, the item's catalog entry shall include a factual content note (e.g., "Includes references to underage alcohol use and strong language"). Stickers shall be applied to individual titles only. Series or collections shall not be labeled in bulk unless each volume is independently reviewed.

4. Decision and Notification

The decision will be communicated in writing to the requestor. All decisions are final unless appealed (see Section VI).

VI. Appeals

Requestors may appeal a decision by submitting a written request to the Library Director. Appeals will be forwarded to the Alamance County Library Committee. The Committee's decision shall be final within the scope of this policy. A record of sticker decisions and catalog content notes shall be made available for public inspection upon request, subject to applicable privacy protections. The Library Committee may periodically review decisions to ensure policy compliance.

VII. Access and Neutrality

Materials with content notice stickers remain fully accessible to all patrons. No material shall be removed, relocated, or otherwise restricted based on content or viewpoint. Staff shall not limit or discourage access to labeled materials based on a patron's age.

Responsibility for material selection rests with parents or guardians. This policy shall be administered consistently, without regard to the ideology, identity, or background of the author, subject, or characters. This policy shall not be used, directly or indirectly, to target materials based on the race, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, or cultural background of the author, characters, or subject matter.

VIII. Recordkeeping

The Library shall maintain a record of all review requests and decisions under this policy, including whether a sticker was applied and any content note added to the catalog. All labeling decisions shall be documented and maintained in a manner that supports consistency, transparency, and internal review. Materials already reviewed and not labeled will not be subject to reconsideration absent new, substantive evidence.

IX. Policy Review

This policy shall be reviewed biennially by the Library Director and the Alamance County Library Committee to assess its effectiveness, consistency, and legal compliance. Members of the review committee shall receive periodic training on intellectual freedom, viewpoint neutrality, and constitutional limits related to public library policy.

X. Legal and Ethical Compliance

This policy is designed to:

- Comply with the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution
- Align with the Library Bill of Rights and the ALA Freedom to Read Statement¹
- Respect the rights of families to guide their own children's reading without imposing restrictions on others

The Library affirms its commitment to the professional standards of librarianship, including intellectual freedom, access to diverse viewpoints, and resistance to censorship as articulated in the ALA's Freedom to Read and Freedom to View statements.

Public libraries are recognized as limited public forums under federal constitutional law. As such, while the Library may enforce reasonable, viewpoint-neutral rules related to time, place, and manner, it may not discriminate against or suppress access to materials based on their content or perceived viewpoint.

Relevant Legal Authority:

- Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District No. 26 v. Pico, 457 U.S. 853 (1982)
- American Civil Liberties Union v. Board of Education of City of Charlotte, 691 F.2d 1173 (4th Cir. 1982)
- Child Evangelism Fellowship of Md., Inc. v. Montgomery County Pub. Sch., 457 F.3d 376 (4th Cir. 2006)

¹ As adopted by the American Library Association Council, reaffirmed January 2022.