

10.3

Report to / Rapport au:

**Ottawa Public Library Board
Conseil d'administration de la Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa**

February 11, 2025 / 11 février 2025

Submitted by / Soumis par:

**Sonia Bebbington, Chief Librarian and Chief Executive Officer /
Bibliothécaire en chef et Directrice générale**

Contact Person / Personne ressource:

*Alexandra Yarrow, Program Manager, OPL Board & Strategic Services / Gestionnaire
de programmes, Conseil d'administration de la BPO et services stratégiques
(613) 580-2424 x32312. Alexandra.Yarrow@bibliooottawalibrary.ca*

File Number/Numéro du dossier: OPLB-2025-0211-10.3

SUBJECT: Intellectual Freedom Annual Report: 2024 Challenges

OBJET: Liberté intellectuelle rapport annuel: Contestations de 2024

REPORT RECOMMENDATION

That the Ottawa Public Library Board receive this report for information.

RECOMMANDATION DU RAPPORT

**Que le Conseil d'administration de la Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa prenne
connaissance de ce rapport à titre d'information.**

BACKGROUND

In keeping with the *Public Libraries Act, RSO 1990, c.P.44* (“the PLA”), other relevant statutes, laws, and good governance practices, the Ottawa Public Library (“OPL” or “the Library”) Board (“the Board”) is accountable for the full range of decisions affecting the organization. According to Section 15 of the PLA, the Chief Executive Officer (“CEO”) supervises and directs the operations of the public library and its staff and shall have other powers and duties that the Board assigns to them from time to time.

As per OPL Board Policy 001, “Roles and Responsibilities of the Board and Trustees,” the Board has adopted a strategic governance model. In OPL’s Strategic Directions and Priorities 2023-2028, the value of intellectual freedom is defined as “the free and open exchange of lawful information and ideas in a democratic society, respecting individual’s rights to privacy and choice.” OPL’s Intellectual Freedom Position Statement (“the Statement”) was most recently revised and approved by the Board in June 2022 (OPLB-2022-0601), and outlines applicability of free expression to all aspects of Library services, as well as the process for clients to request that the Library reconsider a decision (a formal “challenge” or attempt to remove or restrict access to services) using a “Request for Reconsideration” form. The Statement is supported by the Content Services Framework (“the CS Framework,” OPLB-2020-0304) and several administrative policies relating to other public library services.

As per Board Policy 010, “CEO Reporting and Board Monitoring,” the CEO is responsible for providing the Board with an annual summary of challenges to intellectual freedom in all areas of Library services. Staff report to the Board regarding challenges on a retrospective basis, reporting in February regarding challenges received the previous calendar year.

The purpose of this report is to provide the Board with an annual update regarding Library challenges in 2024.

DISCUSSION

Each year, OPL receives requests for reconsideration from the public via a form on the OPL website. In 2024, eleven (11) formal challenges were received; all challenges were for collection items, as described in **Document 1, 2024 OPL Requests for Reconsideration**. This number is higher than the previous year (2023), when OPL received seven (7) challenges. OPL did not receive any requests for reconsideration of an art exhibit, library program, notice board posting, meeting room rental, or library display.

Staff review, research, and reconsider each item; a response is then provided to the complainant outlining OPL’s decision. Observations from this year’s requests for reconsideration:

- **Types of items challenged:**
 - 11 (all) requests were for items in the print collection;

- 8 requests were for items in the adult collection;
- 3 requests were for an item in the children's collection;
- 0 requests were for an item in the teen collection;
- Most challenges were for items published in the last 10 years.
- **Basis for challenges and desired action:**
 - Client concerns included, in their own words, age-inappropriate content, ideological bias, transphobia, Islamophobia, quality, pro LGBTQIA+ content, inaccurate medical information, and explicit content.
 - Six (6) requests were to remove the item entirely from the collection, three (3) suggested adding a warning label, one (1) suggested moving an item from the children's collection to the teen collection, and one (1) did not request a specific action.
 - **Actions taken:** All items were retained in the existing collection area.

Additional Request for Reconsideration forms (15 in total) were received containing client feedback or requests for other services; these were redirected and responded to by the appropriate OPL department. In some cases, submissions via the form, whether they represent challenges to intellectual freedom or other requests, have highlighted other service needs unrelated to upholding free expression: for example, feedback regarding a title in the nonfiction health collection highlighted a need to prioritize collection maintenance of that subject area in 2025 to ensure selections remain timely and relevant. Further, in 2024, OPL also received 10 items of correspondence in which clients raised concerns about Library materials or services, as well as additional informal reports from staff regarding isolated instances of signage or materials being altered.

Following the 2023 Intellectual Freedom Annual Report regarding challenges, staff conducted a review of Request for Reconsideration decisions from 2015 - 2023 and also reviewed missing rates in collection areas that were identified as "at risk."

Retrospective re-purchasing of items appearing on previous annual Requests for Reconsideration lists is not recommended as the items do not meet current selection criteria, nor have they been the subject of client suggestions to purchase. The review of missing rates confirmed that 2024 rates in subject areas identified as "at risk" for intellectual freedom challenges remain on par with missing rates for other subject areas.

OPL regularly submits challenges to the Canadian Federation of Libraries Association's Intellectual Freedom Challenges Survey which provides a snapshot of the nature and outcome of challenges across Canada. OPL also submits challenges to the Centre for Free Expression (CFE) Library Challenges Database at Toronto Metropolitan University.

Staff will continue to track challenges to intellectual freedom at OPL and will provide the next annual report to the Board in Q1 2026.

CONSULTATION

OPL staff and management were consulted in the development of this report.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

Ottawa Public Library supports and considers the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, (2005)* in its operations. There are no accessibility impacts associated with this report.

BOARD PRIORITIES

This report ensures compliance with OPL's Intellectual Freedom Position Statement and the CEO Reporting and Board Monitoring Policy regarding reporting requirements related to intellectual freedom challenges.

BUSINESS ANALYSIS IMPLICATIONS

There are no business analysis considerations associated with this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

OPL does not knowingly acquire material or offer services that contravene or violate applicable laws. Should activities be suspected of contravening the law, OPL will seek a legal opinion regarding next steps. A robust intellectual freedom program helps OPL reduce the risk of legal challenges and ensures OPL can administer effective and legally sound policies and practices, properly educate and support employees and trustees, and champion intellectual freedom.

INDIGENOUS AND GENDER EQUITY IMPLICATIONS

The responsibility to uphold intellectual freedom comes with a complementary responsibility to ensure perspectives that have been traditionally marginalized or excluded are equitably presented in OPL services. When upholding our commitment to intellectual freedom, OPL will continue to work with individuals and groups who have been traditionally excluded, to ensure their perspectives are represented in the Library.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Consistent practices and transparent public communication regarding challenges assists in clarifying the values and legal obligations of the Library and may reduce risks to the organization.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate technology implications associated with this report.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Document 1 2024 OPL Requests for Reconsideration

DISPOSITION

Staff will provide the next annual report on intellectual freedom challenges in Q1 2026.

2024 OPL Requests for Reconsideration

Document 1

Title	Creator	Pub. date	Collection	Language	Basis for challenge	Desired action	OPL action
Beginning with Heidegger	Michael Millerman	2020	Adult English Non-Fiction	English	Politically/ Ideologically Biased	Remove	Retained
Irreversible Damage	Abigail Shrier	2020	Adult English Non-Fiction	English	Transphobia	Remove	Retained
Pretty Ugly	David Sedaris	2024	Juvenile English Picture book	English	Inappropriate for age	Relocate	Retained
Les Piranhas ne mangent pas d'ananas	Aaron Blabey	2019	Juvenile French Picture book	French	Inappropriate for age	Relocate	Retained
A Traitor in Whitehall	Julia Kelly	2023	Adult English Non-Fiction	English	Quality of content	Remove	Retained
The Muhammad Code	Howard Bloom	2016	Adult English Non-Fiction	English	Inaccurate Information Islamophobic	Remove	Retained
History Of Mistresses	Elizabeth Abbott	2004	Adult English Non-Fiction	English	Explicit content	Content warning	Retained
Horseman: A Tale of Sleepy Hollow	Christina Henry	2021	Adult English Fiction	English	Pro LGBTQ+	Content warning	Retained
Zo zo zombie. Vol. 8, Rainy season	Yasunari Nagatoshi	2020	Juvenile English Graphic Novel	English	Inappropriate for age	Relocate	Retained
Gut and Psychology Syndrome	Natasha Campbell-McBride	2010	Adult English Non-Fiction	English	Medical misinformation	Remove	