



Ottawa Bibliothèque
Public publique
Library d'Ottawa

10.5

Report to / Rapport au:

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

February 10, 2026 / 10 février 2026

Submitted by / Soumis par:

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SUBJECT: Intellectual Freedom Annual Report - 2025 Challenges

OBJET: Liberté intellectuelle rapport annuel - Contestations de 2025

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 OPLB Policy 001, “Roles and Responsibilities of the Board and Trustees,” the Board has adopted a strategic governance model further outlined in OPLB Policy 002, “Delegation of Authority,” under which the Board has the authority to approve OPL Board policies and position statements.

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.” The Board has developed an Intellectual Freedom Position Statement (“the Statement”) to support this value, last recently revised and approved by the Board in June 2022 (OPLB-2022-0601). The Statement outlines applicability of free expression to all aspects of OPL services, as well as the process for clients to request that OPL reconsider a decision because they believe content is inappropriate, inaccurate, harmful, or otherwise concerning. The Statement outlines the types of content that can be challenged, including collections, library programs, meeting room rentals, art exhibits, notice board postings, or library displays, and is supported by administrative policies related to these 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 have reported to the Board regarding challenges since 2022 on a retrospective basis (in February of each year regarding challenges received the previous calendar year).

The purpose of this report is to provide the Board with an annual update regarding OPL challenges in 2025.

DISCUSSION

OPL receives requests for reconsideration from the public via a form on the OPL website. Previous reports to the Board from 2022 – 2023 included formal challenges, meaning a completed a “Request for Reconsideration” form, which includes a question regarding what action the client wishes OPL to take regarding the content they are concerned about. Staff review each request for reconsideration and provide a response to the complainant outlining OPL’s decision, the policy context, and additional relevant context. Starting in 2024, staff have also included information regarding informal

challenges received via communications, and instances of material being interfered with where it is reasonable to infer intent to restrict access to a particular perspective, in the Board annual report. 2025 marks the first full year since implementation of revised administrative policies in March 2024, when reporting has included challenges to non-collection items.

In 2025, 11 formal challenges were received, including six (6) challenges to collection items and five (5) challenges to a meeting room rental event, as described in **Document 1, 2025 OPL Requests for Reconsideration**. This number is equal to the previous year (2024). Observations from this year's challenges:

- Types of challenges:
 - One (1) was for an item in the adult collection;
 - Four (4) were for items in the children's collection;
 - One (1) was for an item in the teen collection;
 - Five (5) were for a meeting room rental event in February; and,
 - No challenges were received for art exhibits, library programs, notice board postings, or library displays.
- Basis for challenges: Client concerns included, in their own words:
 - Material that "distorts history and encourages anti-Zionism;"
 - Material that provides "incitement to hatred against Israel;"
 - Age-inappropriate material;
 - Misrepresentative content;
 - An event that promotes "discrimination against and potentially libelous assertions regarding transgender people;" and,
 - An event that "promotes hate speech and / or rhetoric that could incite hate or violence."
- Actions requested by clients
 - For collection items, clients requested that items be removed or relocated
 - For the meeting room rental event, clients requested a public apology by OPL, staff training, and / or a change to policies and practices.
 - In some instances, clients did not request OPL take a specific action.
- Actions taken by OPL:
 - All items were retained in the existing collection area; and,
 - The meeting room rental event proceeded.

OPL also received correspondence (email, phone calls or voicemails) in which clients raised concerns about Library materials or services. In some correspondence, clients indicated that they wish OPL to take a specific action to remove or restrict access to a particular current service (for example, a specific meeting room rental, or a specific collection item). In 2025, 80 items of correspondence were received; 49 related to the meeting room rental in February (from 46 individuals and three (3) organizations) and 31 related to a meeting room rental in August for a roundtable discussion about Palestine (from 30 individuals and one (1) organization).

When correspondence is received, OPL's reply focuses on underscoring the value of intellectual freedom, acknowledging the client's views and concerns, and outlining the criteria that factor into specific decisions. When a specific action is suggested by the client, replies also include a link to the formal request for reconsideration process should a client wish to formally challenge an OPL decision. Notably, considering when individuals sent the correspondence, generally days prior to, the day of, or days after the events in question, they may not have submitted a formal request for reconsideration as the event was occurring imminently or had already occurred.

In 2025, three (3) informal reports were received from staff regarding isolated instances of materials being interfered with.

OPL regularly submits challenges and key correspondence to the publicly-available 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 2027.

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 board members, 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 2025 OPL Requests for Reconsideration

DISPOSITION

Staff will provide the next annual report on intellectual freedom challenges in Q1 2027.

2025 OPL Requests for Reconsideration

Document 1

Title	Creator or organizer	Service	Date of publication or event	Collection	Language	Basis for challenge ¹	Desired action	OPL action
A Map for Falasteen	Maysa Odeh	Collection	2024	Children’s Picture Books	English	Anti-Semitism	Remove	Retained
Meet Buffy Sainte-Marie	Elizabeth MacLeod	Collection	2023	Children’s Non Fiction	English	Inaccurate / Misleading Content	Remove	Retained
Big Nate From the Top	Lincoln Peirce	Collection	2010	Children’s Graphic Novels	English	Age Inappropriate	Relocate	Retained
Don’t Look Left	Atef Abu Saif	Collection	2024	Adult Non Fiction	English	Anti-Semitism	Remove	Retained
The Maid I Hired Recently Is Mysterious	Wakame Konbu	Collection	2021	Teen Graphic Novels	English	Age Inappropriate	Relocate	Retained
My Life with Anxiety	Mari Schuh	Collection	2023	Children’s Non Fiction	English	Inaccurate/ Misleading Content	Remove	Retained
Adult Human Female Documentary Screening	Women’s Rights Matter Ottawa	Meeting room rental	February 15, 2025	N/A	English	Transphobia	Ensure those in a position of authority to grant access to the OPL spaces be better screened for homophobic tendencies.	Event proceeded

¹ Text in this column paraphrases client’s own words

Title	Creator or organizer	Service	Date of publication or event	Collection	Language	Basis for challenge ²	Desired action	OPL action
Adult Human Female Documentary Screening	Women's Rights Matter Ottawa	Meeting room rental	February 15, 2025	N/A	English	Transphobia	A public apology to the trans community from OPL; that OPL publish a statement that commits to preventing such a booking in the future	Event proceeded
Adult Human Female Documentary Screening	Women's Rights Matter Ottawa	Meeting room rental	February 15, 2025	N/A	English	Transphobia	Reconsider allowing harmful transphobic groups to host future events promoting transphobic content in their auditoriums	Event proceeded
Adult Human Female Documentary Screening	Women's Rights Matter Ottawa	Meeting room rental	February 15, 2025	N/A	English	Anti-trans	A public apology for hosting anti-trans activists and a statement to the LGBT community committing to better vetting guests and preventing such groups from using public spaces	Event proceeded
Adult Human Female Documentary Screening	Women's Rights Matter Ottawa	Meeting room rental	February 15, 2025	N/A	English	Transphobia	Publicly apologize to the trans community of Ottawa for the harm done; publish a statement detailing plan to prevent this kind of harm from reoccurring; ensure such events are not programmed in the future	Event proceeded

² Text in this column paraphrases client's own words