Iowa Library Association Statement on SF496 Oral Arguments in 8th Circuit Court

The Iowa Library Association (ILA) stands firmly against the censorship embodied in SF496, a legally ambiguous law currently facing an injunction and under review by the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals. This law threatens the principles of free access to information and intellectual freedom, which are cornerstones of libraries and healthy democracies.

SF496 includes provisions that ban books in school libraries containing descriptions of sexual acts and restrict instruction related to sexual orientation and gender identity in elementary schools. These sections have been temporarily blocked by a federal judge, who indicated that they likely violate the First Amendment and are unconstitutionally vague.

Furthermore, ILA emphasizes the importance of providing clear directives to library workers and school districts regarding emerging legislation such as SF496. It is essential for these professionals to operate in an environment where they are well-informed about the legal implications and requirements before the enactment of such laws. ILA actively sought guidance from the Department of Education before the Governor signed this bill into law and engaged with Iowa legislators to ensure that Iowa students can continue to access a diverse range of information and resources in compliance with the law. This proactive approach aimed to safeguard the rights of all individuals involved and maintain the integrity of our libraries as vital community resources.

The injunction has enabled due process, resulting in books being ordered back on shelves. However, a documented "chilling effect" has emerged, where librarians and administrators are not confident in the legality of returning books to libraries, therefore leaving students and taxpayers without access. This effect underscores the ongoing impact of SF496, even in its currently enjoined state.

ILA is committed to raising awareness about the implications of SF496 and advocating for the rights of library workers, library patrons, students, and taxpayers to access a diverse range of information and resources. To this end, ILA has actively engaged with the Department of Education, Iowa legislators, and the general public since the inception of this law. Our inquiries aim to highlight the detrimental effects this law could have on libraries, educators, and the communities we serve and to seek measured alternatives to meet the informational, educational, and cultural goals of Iowans.

Additionally, ILA joined an amicus brief filed in the 8th Circuit appeal that provides the court with information about the professional standards and ethical canons that guide librarians in curating library collections: library collections that provide access to a broad and diverse array of material that is constitutionally protected and will be censored if SF496 goes into effect.

We call upon our members, supporters, and the public to join us in this crucial effort. Together, we can uphold the values of intellectual freedom and ensure that our libraries remain community anchor institutions as well as bastions of knowledge and access.

Support Iowa library workers and the freedom to read. Contact your legislators, attend school board meetings, support teacher librarians and library workers, share social media campaigns and write letters which champion equitable access to information, and support policies and candidates which support literacy and libraries.

For more information, please visit our www.iowalibraryassociation.org.