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Letter to Pocahontas Board of Education Supporting Selections of Books & Materials:

On February 4th a teacher at Pocahontas County High School distributed to students the books *The Hate U Give* and *This Book is Anti-Racist: 20 Lessons to Wake up, Take Action, and Do the Work* and was met with protest from the community on social media.

We write now to urge this board to underscore the importance of academic freedom and to encourage a diversity of viewpoints by supporting the teacher's choice to include this material in her class curriculum. .

Pocahontas County Board policy supports students' right to learn "in a nondiscriminatory manner that reflects the cultural diversity and pluralistic nature of American society" (Pocahontas County Policy 2260) and that the board permits the introduction and proper educational use of controversial issues provided that their use in the instructional program a) is related to the instructional goals of the course of study and level of maturity of the students; b) does not tend to indoctrinate or persuade students to a particular point of view; c) encourages

open-mindedness and is conducted in a spirit of scholarly inquiry (Pocahontas County Policy 2240).

Samara Mann, ELA teacher at Pocahontas High School, explained to the Pocahontas Times Newspaper that she uses themes in her class and prior to this assignment, the students were studying “The Book Thief,” which follows a teen girl during World War II and her experiences in witnessing the treatment of Jewish people by the Nazis.

“I wanted to take the themes from ‘The Book Thief’ and bring them into a modern setting and carry on those themes of perspective and prejudice, and how it can harm much more deeply than we even understand.”

*The Hate U Give* is a response to many issues that are prevalent now more than ever, and including this book in a course’s curriculum allows for a broader understanding of perspectives and an avenue for open dialogue and discussion. Mann assigned the two books together because “The Hate U Give” is the story of a high school girl witnessing the shooting death of a Black teen by a police officer—a narrative which is reflective of far too many recent events across the country—and “This Book Is Anti-Racist” provides a guidebook and lessons to teenagers on addressing subjects like racism.

“I thought that ‘The Hate U Give’ would be an event,” she said. “The characters represent so many perspectives that we can talk about and discuss. I feel that I grew up in a very small community, and I wanted to give them a benefit that I didn’t have when I got thrust into the real world with real people that didn’t look like me. I wanted to give them more and to provide the scaffolding to safely discuss it without judgment.”

These books meet West Virginia Content Standards and Objectives in English and Language Arts while providing different perspectives and opportunities for reflection and discussion.

The teaching of these books is supported by multiple state and county policies, including the following Pocahontas County policies” 2260 Nondiscrimination and Access to Equal Educational Opportunity, 2131 Educational Outcome Goals, 0134 Promotion of School Board Effectiveness, 2240 Controversial Issues, 2120.01 Local School Improvement Council and 2112 Bill of Rights and Responsibilities for Students and School Personnel.

Ms. Mann has led by example with her choices. She put extensive thought into the selection of these books as part of the curriculum.

The board’s support is crucial. By supporting the selection of books like *The Hate U Give* and *This Book is Anti-Racist: 20 Lessons to Wake up, Take Action, and Do the Work*—as well as other selections that might spark thoughtful conversations around systemic racism—the board will help lift up Pocahontas County as both leaders and advocates of anti-racism and encourage other local school boards to support their educators’ decisions on what they see as appropriate and necessary to providing to an equal and diverse education experience.

Sincerely Yours,

ACLU of West Virginia

American Friends Service Committee

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Black Lives Matter Beckley

Black Lives Matter Eastern Panhandle

Black Lives Matter Huntington

Black Lives Matter Morgantown

Black MOV

Black Lives Matter Youth

Black Lives Matter West Virginia

Families Leading Change

Literacy Volunteers of Monongalia and Preston Counties

Mountain State Justice

NAACP West Virginia State Conference

Our Future West Virginia

Planned Parenthood South Atlantic

West Virginia Chapter, National Association of Social Workers

West Virginia Family of Convicted People

West Virginia FREE

West Virginia Literacy Coalition

West Virginia NOW

West Virginia Working Families Party

Young West Virginia