

Notes for Display PowerPoint Presentation, June 22, 2015

Slide #1: Today we want to review the library's displays & handouts policy in view of concerns expressed earlier this year about a reproduction/birth control display at Central Library. The display was up the entire month of April.

Slide#2: On April 24th we received an email expressing essentially two concerns about the display. We are grateful when people bring their concerns to the library and we always welcome input on library policies and procedures. The Library Board takes policy development very seriously. We check with other libraries, seek legal counsel, and generally discuss policies for months at public meetings before adopting or revising a policy. So, we welcome public input. In this case, we appreciate the thoughtful and measured manner in which concerns have been expressed.

Slide#3: In response to the concerns about the April display, my review of the library's display policy and procedures raised several issues that deserve the Library Board's attention. This is the first one: The display permission form. The form has been used for over 20 years and was never an issue, but just because something has been used a long time doesn't mean it shouldn't change. All JMRL branches have used the form BUT it has only been used consistently with displays that have included items of significant value such as antiques or artwork. It is understandable that the form wouldn't be used with most displays because **the permission form, as you can see, isn't for JMRL to give permission to an exhibitor, it is just the opposite: the exhibitor is giving permission to JMRL to display the materials without financial liability.**

Slide #4: So, my first of three recommendations is to revise the form. Retain the liability wording while adding wording to acknowledge the exhibitor and branch manager agree the display conforms to policies, perhaps with a checklist. Also, the form should say no changes can be made to a display without the branch manager's permission AND the form should be used for ALL displays.

Slide #5: My second recommendation regards the library's records retention and disposition policy. This 10-page policy, last updated in 2012, lists the retention period for library records. Though the policy was based on recommendations from the state library and adopted in 2004 and then updated just 3 years ago, nowhere does it mention the display permission form. Fortunately, library staff has retained the forms consistent with the retention of other forms, but the policy should provide a strict retention period.

Slide #6: So, my second recommendation is to update the records retention & disposition policy to include, I hope, a revised display permission form.

Slide #7: My third recommendation is to review the current displays & handouts policy with legal counsel to see if the wording can be improved or clarified.

Slide #8: Going back to the April 24th concerns [read slide]

Slide #9: This is wording from the current policy. The Note, which is in bold type, states the library does not endorse causes, opinions, or activities, BUT maybe we can explain or clarify that wording because in fact the Pregnancy Center is scheduled to have a display at Central Library this fall. And, under the

current policy the library would welcome a display by the NRA on gun safety. The library would likely take some criticism for that---but gun ownership is a well-established right in the United States, as are reproduction and birth control. The fact that some legal activities are offensive to some citizens does not make those activities political. Perhaps we could clarify the library's position on that.

Slide #10: I think our Library Board President did an excellent job of articulating the real-life environment in our diverse community. Opinions vary.

Slide #11: 24,869---That's the number of people who visited Central Library in April, most of whom passed the display twice, coming and going. Even though only one person was concerned enough about April's display to meet with the Library Board and even though more people came to the Library Board in support of the display, we certainly understand it can be unsettling to see condoms and birth control pills and descriptions of female anatomy in a library display. We are sensitive to that. But, children and adults can see condoms many other places in our community, they are referred to in cartoons, like The Simpsons, and some urban libraries, including right here in Virginia, distribute condoms free in support of public health. The description of the clitoris had a 7th grade reading level. So the display wasn't forcing an anatomy lesson on youngsters. Essentially, library staff would have had a weak case within library policy to exclude the April display.

Slide #12: INCLUSION is a core public library value. Not just at JMRL but at libraries everywhere in America. JMRL's policies, carefully developed over decades by citizen Trustees, encourage staff to look for reasons to INCLUDE a book, a display, or a work of art. We do not want to encourage staff to seek out reasons to exclude something.

Slide #13: JMRL's policy of inclusion is consistent throughout the Policy Manual. If you look at the Materials Selection Policy you see [read]

Slide #14: The Art Display Policy says [read] Basically, unless it advocates illegal activity, or will cause a riot, or upset the U.S. Supreme Court, we'll allow the artwork in the library.

Slide #15: The Meetings Room Policy is similar to the display policy [read] It is inclusive. Will the library receive complaints if certain groups meet here? Yes, and we have. But that's to be expected when you open rooms, display cases, and art walls to our diverse community.

Side #16: All that being said, I would like to reiterate my 3 recommendations [read] I think all of that can be accomplished this summer and fall. People can disagree sometimes and some may disagree with some of the points I've made today. Reasonable people can disagree. Again, I want to thank everyone who submitted thoughts and opinions regarding the April display at Central Library. I hope this presentation has shown how seriously the library considers the opinions of the many thousands of people we serve. Now, I will gladly take questions from the Board.