

March 6, 2023

Dr. Scott Rocco, Superintendent of
Hamilton Township School District
90 Park Avenue
Hamilton, NJ 08690

Dear Dr. Rocco:

This complaint is being submitted pursuant to *District Policy 9130 Public Complaints and Grievances* for the removal of the book entitled Flamer, by Mike Curato and published by Godwin Books, from all school libraries as well as district e-book availability to students. Currently, this book is available in Nottingham High School's library (maybe others in the district as well). This book's content is not suitable for the maturation level of the children it is available to and contains adult content, sexual situations, vulgarity and may lead children into dangerous situations. It also conflicts with standards in the district's own policies. . **Explanation and details of these concerns, along with a sincere request for your attention to the Hamilton Township Board of Education policies and NJ Law are found in this letter. We ask that you read the examples taken directly from the book which are listed below.**

Reference is made to *District Policy 2530 Resource Materials* that states "[t]he Board of Education shall provide resource materials to implement district and school educational goals and objectives..." (emphasis added). *District Policy 2530* further states that "[t]he Superintendent shall be responsible for the selection and maintenance of all resource materials...."

Reference is made to *District Policy 5610 Suspension* which states that a student who is guilty of "habitual use of profanity or of obscene language...shall be liable to punishment and to suspension or expulsion from school."

Reference is made to *District Policy 2361 Acceptable Use of Computer Network/Computers and Resources* that notes:

Internet Safety Protection

As a condition for receipt of certain Federal funding, the school district shall be in compliance with the Children's Internet Protection Act, the Neighborhood Children's Internet Protection Act, and has installed technology protection measures for all computers in the school district, including computers in media centers/libraries. The technology protection must block and/or filter material and visual depictions that are obscene as defined in Section 1460 of Title 18, United States Code; child pornography, as defined in Section 2256 of Title 18, United States Code; are harmful to minors including any pictures, images, graphic image file or other material or visual depiction that taken as a whole and with respect to

minors, appeals to a prurient interest in nudity, sex, or excretion; or depicts, describes, or represents in a patently offensive way, with respect to what is suitable for minors, sexual acts or conduct; or taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value as to minors. (emphasis added)

This Policy also establishes Internet safety policy and procedures in the district as required in the Neighborhood Children's Internet Protection Act. Policy 2361 addresses access by minors to inappropriate matter on the Internet and World Wide Web; the safety and security of minors when using electronic mail, chat rooms, and other forms of direct electronic communications; unauthorized access, including "hacking" and other unlawful activities by minors online; unauthorized disclosures, use, and dissemination of personal identification information regarding minors; and measures designed to restrict minors' access to materials harmful to minors.

It is highly recommended that you read the entire book and ask yourself what are the educational goals and objectives of the school district that Flamer is serving, given the examples highlighted below, and whether this book is suitable to the maturation levels of the children in the district who have access to it.

1. Appropriate for all maturity levels.

This book is not appropriate for any maturity level for children under 18 years old.

The book Flamer, by Michael Curato violates the District 2008 book standards for maturity for all levels by inappropriate matters presented to children under 18 years old such as: sexual fantasy, self-loathing, suicide contemplation, homoerotic imagery, highly offensive debasing of the Roman Catholic religion, foul sexual insult of a Roman Catholic priest, use of a Roman Catholic sacramental chalice as a beacon to nudity, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ used as expletives, cross-dressing fantasy, thoughts of personal death, underage drinking of alcohol, disrespect of young women, and use of pornography. Throughout the book, rude, coarse and disgusting profanity is used frequently. The tone of the book is highly emotional and sexual. A review by Publishers Weekly aptly calls the book "emotional and raw".

2. Material is used for opposing views, with guidance, for critical thinking.

The book Flamer should not be used to for critical thinking, with or without guidance, as it is in potentially in violation of the New Jersey Code of Criminal Justice 2C:34-3 Obscenity for persons under 18. Please see below.

3. Materials will represent many religions, ethnic, and cultural groups and their contributions to American Heritage.

The book Flamer, is offensive to the Roman Catholic Church. The depictions of sacred ceremonies, sacraments and sacred items are profaned by interspersing them amongst

base concepts of immature sensuality and foul language. Far from celebrating the Roman Catholic Church's tremendous contributions to American heritage, such as successful school systems, hospitals and the formation of millions of people who serve our country up to our highest offices. The book is used to bring confusion and spiritual doubt to a young readers mind. In addition, most Christian, Muslim and some Jewish families would object to the premise of the book as oppositional to the teachings of revealed truth.

4. Factually accurate and of genuine literary and artistic value

The book Flamer, with its poor grammar, excessive and foul language has no literary value. The story is of a serious struggle within a young man's mind over his confused sexuality, broken relationship with his father, thoughts of suicide and hellfire. Those topics are not uplifting or nurturing even of the subject it proports to help young people address. Many of the cartoon pictures are crass and immature. Content such as this should not be in the hands of impressionable children.

5. Quality and durability

It suffices to say this is irrelevant considering the serious problems of the book.

6. Relates to, supports and enriches the course of study adopted by the Hamilton School Board.

The book, Flamer, does not fit into any course of study unless the Hamilton School board has adopted standards to teach profanity, anti-Catholic bigotry, and sexually arousing thoughts designed to lead a child to later sexual activity.

The evidence of the above statements is:

Pg 3-5- Gives impression of a child setting himself on fire

Pg 14- "pricks", "such any dicks", disparages Catholic school students

Pg 15- Depicts degrading, physical force of boys putting a student into a toilet head first

Pg 20- "ass"

Pg 22- Sexual innuendo, Name of Jesus as expletive

Pg 23- Sexual innuendo displayed with hot dog (wiener)and young man's buttocks as a bun

Pg 25- Dad shown as a dark demonic shadow

Pg 57- "jackass"

Pg 69- Cross dressing fantasy in a boy

Pg 72- Close up drawing of boy's jeans unzipping

Pg 74- Focus on penis size

Pg 75- Nude bodies of teen boys in shower, less than completely covered by steam

Pg 76- Boy's fascination and focus on viewing other boy's nude bodies

Pg 77- "I don't want you homos looking at my ass"

Pg 78- Hairy ass contest

Pg 80- Depiction of boy on his knees at eye level of another boy's private parts in the shower while realizing he is getting an erection

Pg 82-88- Interspersed Catholic Ceremony scenes after boy's mind was on homoeroticism

Pg 86 "I wonder if priests jerk off"

Pg 89- Boy's thoughts of his death and funeral depicted

Pg 91- Hate of sister, "All she does is bitch at me"

Pg 92- "People thought I was pretty weird because I was Catholic"

Pg 95- Sacred Chalice used a beacon at a castle leading to nude man in shower

Pg 99-100- Relating parts of an arrow to parts of a penis. This will be a symbol used throughout book.

Pg 101- Innuendo of gripping arrow like gripping penis

Pg 102- F word

Pg 105- Sexual innuendo eating your own hot dog

Pg 108- "badass"

Pg 112- Boy wishes he was a woman superhero

Pg 113- Anger, "make them say" using fire and fist to depict force

Pg 118- "Demeaning talk of girls, "How is her rack?", "face in her boobs", "stone cold bitch", F word, "boner", "dick hard when think of her", 3 more f words, "dick", "faggot"

Pg 125- Criticism of Catholic teaching on sexual acts

Pg 127- More burning with anger

Pg 130- Alluding to masturbation in cartoon

Pg 131- Underage drinking of alcohol

Pg 132- Depiction of boy's shock watching his father's porn videos, sexual response to porn "feels good"

Pg 135- Depiction of boy looking for erection under bed covers

Pg 144- Depiction of Saint Sebastian who is a revered saint in Christian history. The image, often painted as a young man, unclothed except a loin cloth and martyred by arrows. This image is often used in gay publication in a derogatory manner.

Pg 146- Demeaning of Catholic sacrament of Confirmation and sowing of spiritual doubt in young minds

Pg 156- Shirtless male body reaching his hand out to reader

Pg 167- Boy asking "spirit world"

Pg 168- Pubic hair, bald nuts

Pg 186- The name of Jesus Christ used as an expletive, 2 F words

Pg 194- Boy and arrow innuendo

Pg 195- There is no true north

Pg 196- Depiction of anger at gays, anger at painful rejection, 2 "F" words, anger causes boy to knock out another boy's teeth.

Pg 214- Holy "F"

Pg 228 Disobedient taking of a boat at night

Pg 235 "Douch bag"

Pg 234-239- Emotional depiction of male-male attraction

Pg 245- Male to male kiss on cheek, boy is painfully spurned

Pg 264 "faggot"

Pg 266- Pedophile discussion by grown men

Pg 267- Derogatory depiction of sexual morality

Pg 280-285- Boy's suffering, depression, suicide contemplation

Pg 287 – Arrow looks like penis innuendo

Pg 300-314- Boy contemplates slitting wrists in a chapel

Pg 315- Hellfire boy with exposed penis becomes the life force inoculating boy with an arrow (penis innuendo). Depiction of hellfire turning good and boy will be okay with new found life in his soul.

Regards,

Hamilton Residents

Claire Burns

John Muka

Patricia Staley

Joseph Jesson

Rosemary Griegel

Jeff Hewitson

CC: Susan Lombardo

Dina Thornton

Stacy Byrne

Anthony Celetano

Liam Z. Gonzales

Susan Ferrara

Christina Vassiliou Harvey

Richard Kanka

Jason McSheen

Exhibit A

Section 2C:34-3 - Obscenity for persons under 18a.

Definitions for purposes of this section:(1) "Obscene material" means any description, narrative account, display, depiction of a specified anatomical area or specified sexual activity contained in, or consisting of, a picture or other representation, publication, sound recording, live performance or film, which by means of posing, composition, format or animated sensual details, emits sensuality with sufficient impact to concentrate prurient interest on the area or activity.(2) "Obscene film" means any motion picture film or preview or trailer to a film, not including newsreels portraying actual current events or pictorial news of the day, in which a scene, taken by itself:(a) Depicts a specified anatomical area or specified sexual activity, or the simulation of a specified sexual activity, or verbalization concerning a specified sexual activity; and(b) Emits sensuality sufficient, in terms of the duration and impact of the depiction, to appeal to prurient interest.(3) "Specified anatomical area" means:(a) Less than completely and opaquely covered human genitals, pubic region, buttock or female breasts below a point immediately above the top of the areola; or(b) Human male genitals in a discernibly turgid state, even if covered.(4) "Specified sexual activity" means:(a) Human genitals in a state of sexual stimulation or arousal; or(b) Any act of human masturbation, sexual intercourse or deviate sexual intercourse; or(c) Fondling or other erotic touching of covered or uncovered human genitals, pubic region, buttock or female breast.(5) "Knowingly" means:(a) Having knowledge of the character and content of the material or film described herein; or(b) Having failed to exercise reasonable inspection which would disclose its character and content.(6) "Exhibit" means the sale of admission to view obscene material.(7) "Show" means cause or allow to be seen.**b. Promoting obscene material.**(1) A person who knowingly sells, distributes, rents or exhibits to a person under 18 years of age obscene material is guilty of a crime of the third degree.(2) A person who knowingly shows obscene material to a person under 18 years of age with the knowledge or purpose to arouse, gratify or stimulate himself or another is guilty of a crime of the third degree if the person showing the obscene material is at least four years older than the person under 18 years of age viewing the material.**c. Admitting to exhibition of obscene film.**(1) Any person who knowingly admits a person under 18 years of age to a theatre then exhibiting an obscene film is guilty of a crime of the third degree.(2) A person who knowingly shows an obscene film to a person under 18 years of age with the knowledge or purpose to arouse, gratify or stimulate himself or another is guilty of a crime of the third degree if the person showing the obscene film is at least four years older than the person under 18 years of age viewing the film.**d. Presumption of knowledge and age.**
The requisite knowledge with regard to the character and content of the film or material and of the age of the person is presumed in the case of an actor who sells, distributes, rents, exhibits or shows obscene material to a person under 18 years of age or admits to a film obscene for a person under 18 years of age a person who is under 18 years of age. **e. Defenses.**(1) It is an affirmative defense to a prosecution under subsections b. and c. which the defendant must prove by a preponderance of evidence that:(a) The person under age 18 falsely represented in or by

writing that he was age 18 or over;(b) The person's appearance was such that an individual of ordinary prudence would believe him to be age 18 or over; and(c) The sale, distribution, rental, showing or exhibition to or admission of the person was made in good faith relying upon such written representation and appearance and in the reasonable belief that he was actually age 18 or over.(2) It is an affirmative defense to a prosecution under subsection c. that the defendant is an employee in a motion picture theatre who has no financial interest in that motion picture theatre other than his wages and has no decision-making authority or responsibility with respect to the selection of the motion picture show which is exhibited.

N.J.S. § 2C:34-3

Amended by 1989, c.54, s.2; c. 227.

Exhibit B

9:6-1. ABUSE, ABANDONMENT, CRUELTY AND NEGLECT OF CHILD; WHAT CONSTITUTES

Abuse of a child shall consist in any of the following acts: (a) disposing of the custody of a child contrary to law; (b) employing or permitting a child to be employed in any vocation or employment injurious to its health or dangerous to its life or limb, or contrary to the laws of this State; (c) employing or permitting a child to be employed in any occupation, employment or vocation dangerous to the morals of such child; (d) the habitual use by the parent or by a person having the custody and control of a child, in the hearing of such child, of profane, indecent or obscene language; (e) the performing of any indecent, immoral or unlawful act or deed, in the presence of a child, that may tend to debauch or endanger or degrade the morals of the child; (f) permitting or allowing any other person to perform any indecent, immoral or unlawful act in the presence of the child that may tend to debauch or endanger the morals of such child; (g) using excessive physical restraint on the child under circumstances which do not indicate that the child's behavior is harmful to himself, others or property; or (h) in an institution as defined in section 1 of P.L.1974, c. 119 (C. 9:6-8.21), willfully isolating the child from ordinary social contact under circumstances which indicate emotional or social deprivation.

Abandonment of a child shall consist in any of the following acts by anyone having the custody or control of the child: (a) willfully forsaking a child; (b) failing to care for and keep the control and custody of a child so that the child shall be exposed to physical or moral risk without proper and sufficient protection; (c) failing to care for and keep the control and custody of a child so that the child shall be liable to be supported and maintained at the expense of the public, or by child caring societies or private persons not legally chargeable with its or their care, custody and control.

Cruelty to a child shall consist in any of the following acts: (a) inflicting unnecessarily severe corporal punishment upon a child; (b) inflicting upon a child unnecessary suffering or pain, either mental or physical; (c) habitually tormenting, vexing or afflicting a child; (d) any willful act of omission or commission whereby unnecessary pain and suffering, whether mental or physical, is caused or permitted to be inflicted on a child; (e) or exposing a child to unnecessary hardship, fatigue or mental or physical strains that may tend to injure the health or physical or moral well-being of such child.

Neglect of a child shall consist in any of the following acts, by anyone having the custody or control of the child:(a) willfully failing to provide proper and sufficient food, clothing, maintenance, regular school education as required by law, medical attendance or surgical treatment, and a clean and proper

home, or (b) failure to do or permit to be done any act necessary for the child's physical or moral well-being. Neglect also means the continued inappropriate placement of a child in an institution, as defined in section 1 of P.L.1974, c. 119 (C. 9:6-8.21), with the knowledge that the placement has resulted and may continue to result in harm to the child's mental or physical well-being.