

Letter to Westport Library Leadership and Town Officials Addressing Bias and Censorship
from Alessandra Gordonos, Ph.D. and co-signed by 45 Westport residents

June 29, 2022

To the Executive Director and Trustees of the Westport Library and elected officials of the Town of Westport:

I am writing with a sense of deep frustration and concern but also a sense of encouragement thanks to the support of the 45 Westport residents who have agreed to co-sign this letter just within the past 24 hours. Over the past several months, I have engaged with the Westport Library to have an important book added to its collection. The Library has refused to add the book, however, despite offers by me and others to purchase the book ourselves.

As I will document below, the Library is unwilling to offer the book to the citizens of Westport because of objections to its content. By taking this position, the Westport Library is engaging in political censorship in blatant violation of the Library Bill of Rights that it proclaims on its own website: <https://westportlibrary.org/about/policies/bill-of-rights/>. This is unacceptable and most likely unlawful. I am calling upon all individuals connected with the Westport Library and Town government who are in a position to help rectify this situation to step up and take immediate action.

The book in question is *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing our Daughters*. The book was published in 2020 and authored by Abigail Shrier, a writer for *The Wall Street Journal* with degrees from Columbia, Oxford and Yale Law School. Ms. Shrier addresses the controversial subject of gender dysphoria and takes a critical look at various medical practices. While the book has been attacked by proponents of these practices, it has also been hailed as an important and well-researched book by *The Economist*, *The Times of London* and many other respected publications and commentators.

A word about me and my interest in this book. The phrase "I am not a biologist" has captured the public imagination recently, but I am, in fact, a biologist. I have a Ph.D. in Human Genetics and teach at the university level in Connecticut. I also participate in a local book club, whose members were interested in reading and discussing this well-known book, in part to benefit from my scientific background. After repeated attempts to obtain *Irreversible Damage* from the Westport Library, I received the following message from the Manager, Collection Curation, who wrote:

"Thank you for your purchase request for the book, 'Irresistible Damage' [sic] by Abigail Shirer [sic]. The purchasing committee has decided not to purchase the book due to the mixed reviews as well as an article featured in Psychology Today. The book reviews talk about omitted information and misinformation from some of the results of the studies the author cites in the book. Because we cannot trust the information in the book it was decided not to add it to the collection."

As a scientist, a Westport taxpayer and an American citizen, I am deeply disturbed by this response to my request and feel a moral obligation to make my objections known. In essence, this employee of the Westport Library explained to me that a widely read and debated book on a topic of immense public interest is effectively banned because there have been challenges to the information and analysis it

presents. As if any book on a complex, controversial topic would not in some cases receive negative or critical reviews! Are the shelves of the Westport Library not filled with books whose content and factual accuracy have been questioned or disputed? Since when is it the job of a library to shield the public from literature it arbitrarily decides cannot be trusted?

It is, in fact, the job of a library to supply members of the public with the literature they want and need to form their own conclusions. The Library Bill of Rights sets forth clear obligations:

“Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues... Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval... Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment... Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.”

Westport Library is working against its core mission of promoting free speech by preventing access to this book. Why would Westport Library behave in such a manner? Unfortunately, the effective “cancellation” of this book appears to be representative of a pattern. Attempts by community members to bring in speakers who are critical of certain progressive perspectives have been stymied. Community members have also met resistance when they have requested other books authored by prominent conservative intellectuals. The focus of this letter is the Westport Library’s egregious rejection of *Irreversible Damage*, but I and other Westport community members are eager to discuss additional experiences we have had along these lines. This incident should serve as a starting point to address the much broader problem of political bias, which is preventing the Westport Library from fulfilling its public purpose.

What should you do about this?

The Executive Director of the Westport Library should immediately purchase (or accept donation of) a reasonable number of copies of *Irreversible Damage*. If he is unwilling to do so, he should resign, because he is unwilling to fulfill the core mission of any American library.

The Board of Trustees of the Westport Library should call upon the Director of the Library to obtain the book. Any member of the Board who is unwilling to do so should resign. The Board of Trustees should also form a committee or otherwise set up a process to examine how political bias is affecting Westport Library’s ability to live up to the Library Bill of Rights, to which it is supposedly committed.

The Westport RTM, especially the Library, Museum and Arts Committee, must intervene here, as the branch of local government that appoints members of the Board of Trustees of the Westport Library and approves its funding. The RTM represents the citizens of Westport who actually pay for the Westport Library and are its ultimate constituents. Rather than focus on matters of national concern over which it has no power, the RTM can and should play an essential role holding the Library accountable to the people of Westport.

The First Selectwoman has spoken publicly of the potentially constructive role the Westport Library can play in community discussions on difficult topics. In keeping with her stated objective of making Westport more welcoming, she should lend support to efforts to make sure the Westport Library is committed to free speech and an open exchange of ideas.

Thank you all for your attention to this extremely important issue. Regardless of one's views on transgenderism or any other topic, any fair-minded person should take offense to this failure by the Westport Library to abide by its own policies and core values. I look forward to your response. I can be reached at gordonale068@gmail.com.

Yours truly,

Alessandra Gordonos, Ph.D.