



The ALLA Executive Council is currently reviewing the decisions made at the Alabama Public Library Services (APLS) board meeting on May 8, 2025, as well as the recent memo released this past Monday. This memo includes the board's new "sexually explicit material" definition and a directive from APLS board chair John Wahl that libraries must immediately comply with these new definitions by reviewing their children's and teen collections, and moving books that have any topic listed in the "sexually explicit material" definition into their adult sections. The Association is concerned but also confused by several things in this memo, particularly the lack of discussion about how the board will codify this new definition into the APLS administrative state code as an official rule requirement. That is just one of many questions we have about this memo, and we hope to learn the answers in the coming days.

We find it necessary to address the conduct displayed during the May 8th meeting, particularly the discourteous and dismissive treatment of library directors, librarians, and library supporters who provided testimony. These individuals came forward in good faith to express concerns and offer constructive feedback, grounded in professional expertise and a deep commitment to serving their communities.

Several speakers were publicly reprimanded or spoken to in a condescending manner for raising legitimate concerns about the politicization of library governance, the need for consultation with subject-matter experts in decision-making, and the protection of federal funding vital to rural libraries. The Board's responses were often dismissive, prioritizing ideology over informed discussion and choosing to ignore the voices of nearly thirty community members who expressed opposition to the Board.

Furthermore, while assurances were given about securing alternative funding, past instances where funds were withheld from compliant libraries were not addressed. Blaming the media for unfavorable coverage while disregarding accountability only exacerbates public mistrust. Library professionals have endured significant scrutiny and baseless accusations in recent years, and it is deeply concerning to see public officials appear to validate these harmful narratives through both rhetoric and action.

For over three years, public librarians across Alabama have performed their duties under extraordinary pressure, frequently targeted by false and inflammatory claims from extremist groups. Such attacks not only endanger individual professionals but also undermine the trust and functionality of public library systems statewide.

The ALLA Executive Council urges the APLS Board Chair and its members to demonstrate leadership, transparency, and accountability by taking the following actions:

- **Hold a listening session** exclusively for public librarians, during which Board members refrain from debate or rebuttal and instead focus on recognizing and documenting concerns.
- **Issue a public apology** to the library professionals who were treated disrespectfully during the May 8th meeting.
- **Acknowledge and address the impact** of dismissive or hostile conduct toward professionals fulfilling their public service mission.
- **Withdraw the “sexually explicit” memo and delay the forthcoming “gender ideology” memo discussed at the May 8th meeting.** If the APLS is to pursue further policy requirements of Alabama libraries, follow established legal procedure for amending the Administrative Code, with appropriate public comment opportunities and thorough consideration of the constitutionality of both memos¹.

The ALLA Executive Council stands firm in its belief that public officials must be held accountable for their role in escalating the current climate of hostility toward library professionals. We reject the vilification of librarians through false and defamatory accusations. There can be no meaningful dialogue when those entrusted with leadership positions perpetuate harmful narratives or disregard the voices of trained professionals and the communities they represent.

Alabama's librarians deserve respect, not reproach, for upholding ethical standards, providing inclusive services, and preserving the integrity of public libraries for all.

Approved May 15, 2025, by the Executive Council of the Alabama Library Association.

¹ Alabama Administrative Procedure Act, Code of Alabama - Title 41, Chapter 22, Sections 1-27, <https://alison.legislature.state.al.us/code-of-alabama?section=41-22-1>