

Statement from Dr. Gwendolyn Reece, Ph.D., Director of Research, Teaching and Learning, American University Library:

Libraries have a sacred trust to preserve the knowledge acquired and created by humanity and to ensure its accessibility. Above all, functional democracies require an engaged and informed citizenry, ruled by reason. Public libraries, therefore, have a further sacred duty in ensuring that our citizens, regardless of socio-economic status, have access to the information they need to meet these essential conditions.

Through employing filtering software, such as the program used in this case, citizens are denied access to information on particular topics and representing specific viewpoints in ways that are not transparent. When conducted by a public library or a public primary or secondary school library, such state-sponsored censorship is typically rationalized in terms of “protecting children.” In this case, the library claims that they are complying with the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA), an act that makes certain types of funding for public libraries and public primary and secondary school libraries contingent on deploying filtering technology. Whatever the initial intent of the law may have been, the software used to comply with CIPA censors numerous topics that have no bearing on protecting children and the way the software blocks access to information reflects a particular constellation of values. The real consequence is to undermine part of the necessary infrastructure in a democracy by denying citizens the requisite tools to inform themselves through free inquiry. As a librarian and a devotee of Athena, I believe that both Ms. Wofford and the Salem, Missouri Public library have failed in their duties and violated the ethics of the profession, as articulated in the Library Bill of Rights [<http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/index.cfm>]. I applaud the ACLU for challenging this pernicious threat to intellectual freedom and hope this suit will restrict the way CIPA is being used to violate our civil rights and undermine our democracy.