FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THOUSANDS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS TURN OUT AGAINST BOOK BAN EFFORT AT GLEN RIDGE PUBLIC LIBRARY

GLEN RIDGE PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES VOTES TO KEEP CHALLENGED LGBTQIA+ BOOKS ON LIBRARY SHELVES

COALITION OF SUPPORTERS SPEAKS OUT AT PUBLIC HEARING, INCLUDING FAMILY OF CHALLENGED AUTHOR AND NEW JERSEY NATIVE, GEORGE M. JOHNSON; LEADERS FROM GLEN RIDGE UNITED AGAINST BOOK BANS; NJ STATE ASSEMBLYWOMAN BRITNEE TIMBERLAKE; LGBTQIA+ NONPROFIT OUT MONTCLAIR; JANE CLEMENTI, MOTHER OF TYLER CLEMENTI; SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS, EDUCATORS, INTERFAITH CLERGY, MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS, STUDENTS, PARENTS AND RESIDENTS

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(FEBRUARY 8, 2023 GLEN RIDGE, NJ) -- LGBTQIA+ nonprofit Out Montclair is responding to the Glen Ridge Public Library Board of Trustees’ unanimous decision tonight to keep six challenged LGBTQIA+-inclusive books on library shelves. The Board’s decision followed two hours of public comment from the community in front of a standing room only crowd in the 800-seat capacity Ridgewood Avenue School auditorium in Glen Ridge.

The Board announced it had received 240 letters from community members and groups about the book ban attempt. More than 40 community members, leaders, librarians, educators, students, parents, elected officials, medical professionals and LGBTQIA+ advocates spoke out before the Board, with an additional 39 community members signed up to speak before the Board closed comments and began deliberations, unanimously affirming each book’s reinstatement in the library.

“The Board’s vote reflects the overwhelming support shown tonight for books, the freedom to read and for every LGBTQIA+ person, youth and family,” said Peter Yacobellis, Out Montclair Executive Director. “This is a victory for the entire community and the coalition that Glen Ridge United organized from the ground up and that Out Montclair was proud to join and support. A chorus of voices came together from all ages, LGBTQIA+ and allies, to say that all should be welcome in the library and find books about their lives
represented and out in the open, where they belong.”

The mother and aunts of Plainfield, NJ, native George M. Johnson, author of one of the challenged books, “All Boys Aren’t Blue,” read a statement from the author which read in part: “Our books are not introducing teens to hard topics. They are simply the resource needed so that they can understand the hard topics that they are living out day to day. As a Black queer person. I know what it’s like to read books that don’t tell my story… You have every right to not allow YOUR child to read it. But you don’t get to trample on the rights of parents like my mother and my aunts who have raised LGBTQ teens who needed books like these.”

Glen Ridge United Against Book Bans organized the campaign for community response to the book ban. It included:

- A petition signed by more than 2,900 residents of Glen Ridge (a borough of 7,000)
- 300 yard signs sold and placed on Glen Ridge lawns
- 300+ t-shirts designed by a local Glen Ridge artist featuring the town’s signature lamps with a flame in Progress Pride colors
- Glen Ridge United announced it has created a fundraiser for the Friends of Glen Ridge Library: https://secure.givelively.org/donate/friends-of-the-glen-ridge-library/philip-johnson-2.

While dozens of community members defending books showed up and spoke out at the meeting, no one from the group seeking to have the books banned spoke at the meeting, or identified themselves publicly if at the meeting. The eight people who purport to be from the so-called "Citizens Defending Education" did not show to defend their position that the books should be banned. One speaker out of the 40 stood up to support the group, falsely claiming it did not intend for the books to be banned (documented filings to the library board show otherwise). His twitter profile shows he has targeted drag events. The person is from Chatham, NJ, and was seen taking pictures of children who go to school where the meeting was held as they spoke before the board.

Additional quotes:

Interfaith clergy from Glen Ridge, Montclair and Bloomfield spoke out: “Most of us have congregants that are LGBTQ+. They need books that tell their story. These books give voice to what they are feeling and experiencing.”

Students from area Gender and Sexuality Alliances spoke out about the absurdity of book bans: “I’m tired of having to fight battles and give speeches when I should be home studying for the ACT,” said one. “You can educate your own children how you’d like, but do not take away my right to decide what I read.

Laura Hoge, clinical director of Spectrum Health in Montclair: “In the last few years, I have spoken to teachers, doctors, social workers, counselors, school board members, the list goes on. I’ve quoted devastating statistics, written op-eds, told first person accounts. The bottom line is this: Where you stand tonight matters. You can either normalize the existence of LGBTQ individuals, or you can become part of the very stigma that threatens the lives of some of the most vulnerable and valuable children in your community.”
Jane Clementi, mother of Tyler Clementi, who tragically took his life 12 years ago in New Jersey after a threat of being outed as a college freshman: “Save your LGBTQ+ youth from years of anguish, depression, and self-hatred. Set a good example to their classmates and peers. Your actions as leaders within your town will impact everyone in your town, not only those members of the LGBTQ+ community, but your straight youth as well. Your straight youth are looking at you to see if their queer peers should be harassed, intimidated, or bullied; or if they are worthy of a place in your community.”

**Additional research:**

Community letters of support against Book Ban (interfaith clergy, medical professionals, LGBTQIA+ advocates, educators)

Who is CDE? 8 people, some of whom have also criticized DEI and other equity initiatives in Glen Ridge. Public record minutes show false claims against LGBTQIA+ books, including false, defamatory and inflammatory claims comparing sex education books to pornography.

**PEN America report**—majority of book ban efforts target LGBTQIA+ books and books about race and racism:

“... the large majority of book bans underway today are not spontaneous, organic expressions of citizen concern. Rather, they reflect the work of a growing number of advocacy organizations that have made demanding censorship of certain books and ideas in schools part of their mission.”

**National Coalition Against Censorship** statement against book bans, signed by more than 600 organizations nationwide:

“Libraries offer students the opportunity to encounter books and other material that they might otherwise never see and the freedom to make their own choices about what to read. Denying young people this freedom to explore—often on the basis of a single controversial passage cited out of context—will limit not only what they can learn but who they can become.”

The **American Library Association** documented the targeting of 1,651 titles from January to September 2022, the most attempted book bans since ALA began keeping records more than 20 years ago. ALA also noted threats against library workers, with “violence, threats of violence and other acts of intimidation” largely targeting books by or about “gay, queer, transgender, Black, Indigenous, persons of color, those with disabilities and religious minorities.”

More information is available at www.facebook.com/GlenRidgeUnited and via the Glen Ridge Public Library, [here](#).

**About Out Montclair**
Out Montclair is a nonprofit organization created to provide support and solidarity for the LGBTQIA+ community of Montclair. We offer educational and charitable activities and events to promote inclusivity and equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, non-binary and gender-fluid youth and adults. Additionally, we are a safe space where our community and our
allies can come together and celebrate who we are. [www.outmontclair.org](http://www.outmontclair.org)

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