

## Virginia News

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# Parents may get records' access

## Issue involves what kids read

The Fairfax County Library Board, bowing to community pressure, stood poised last night to grant parents greater access to their children's book-borrowing records.

A large group of people, many waving signs and wearing buttons urging the board to protect parental rights, showed up, making the normally placid meeting standing room only.

The proposal was prompted by complaints from a group of parents concerned about their children's access to library books containing material on homosexuality, sex, abortion, suicide, the occult and other topics they consider inappropriate.

"If someone else's child wants books or tapes with mature themes, his parents can check them out for him — with their blessing, Jim Brooks, a father of three elementary-school-age children, said before the meeting. "Mine are not ready for it."

At the meeting, the 11-member Board of Library Trustees was considering a committee recommendation, made last month, that would allow parents of children 12 and younger to see what books their youngsters were checking out of the library.

That recommendation cleared the policy committee 7-3, and because a majority of those voting in favor are board members, the measure was expected to be adopted in a vote late last night.

But some who showed up at the meeting took issue with the plan.

T. Chappell Aldridge, who described himself as a "choir-singing, Bible-reading" churchgoer, said restrictions on children's access to library materials would only open the door

to an assault on everyone's rights.

Board Chairman Herbert A. Doyle Jr. in recent weeks has raised questions about the legality of the measure, but as of early last night, it wasn't clear if opening access to library records infringed on children's constitutional right to privacy.

"I'm still somewhat uncomfortable with it," Mr. Doyle said before the vote.

For the last two years, the library board has been struggling to find a middle ground between parental rights over what their children read and a child's right to privacy and free access to information.

The debate began when a group of parents, led by Karen Jo Gounaud, two years ago began complaining about the library system's policy of distributing free materials.

The Washington Blade, a free newspaper written for and about the homosexual community, was

among the handouts and caught the attention of parents, who tried to have it removed.

Two years later the Blade is still available, but has been relegated to back shelves out of reach of small children. The debate, however, continues, and has been expanded to include a number of library books targeted not only for their content, but their covers and titles.

The continuing debate has attracted the attention of the American Civil Liberties Union, which was watching the vote last night. That group has threatened to sue the library board if it begins dismantling children's privacy rights.

A similar issue is under debate across the Potomac in Montgomery County, where county attorneys are reviewing the legality of a proposed family library card that would be in the parents' names but distributed to their children to use.