

**Library Advisory Committee  
Special Meeting  
Thursday, February 26, 2026 @ 1:00 PM  
Appeal of the Request for Reconsideration of the Book “Melissa” by Alex Gino  
Bay County Public Library  
Meeting Room**

Members in Attendance:

Gerry Wilson: Bay County Commissioner Raffield, District 1  
Kendall Middlemas Henley: Bay County Commissioner Carroll, District 2  
Crystal Grey-Hewett: Bay County Commissioner Moore, District 4  
Jeff DiBenedictis: Bay County Commissioner Pease, District 5  
Mary Gibson: Gulf County Commission  
Fran Davis: Liberty County Commission

Members Absent:

Jean Campbell: Bay County Commissioner Crosby, District 3

Library Staff in Attendance:

Robin Shader: Library Director  
Ashley Burlon: Community Relations & Marketing Coordinator  
Logan Clampitt: Administrative and Financial Manager  
Tania Watts: Head of Youth Services  
Nathan West: Adult Services

- I. Call to Order: Chair Jeff DiBenedictis called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm. A quorum was present.
- II. Chairman Introduction & Hearing Purpose: Jeff explained the purpose of the meeting is to hear an appeal of the initial review of the book “Melissa.” The request from the applicant is to move the book to the Young Adult section. He explained that after the discussion the LAC can decide to: (1) remove the book; (2) relocate the book; (3) keep the book in its current location; or (4) suggest something else.
- III. Applicant Comments: Megan Alley agrees that the book is written at a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading level, but the content is “disturbing.” She summarized the book and explained why she believes some of the wording is indecent and not appropriate for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>-graders. Also, another concern for her was that there were no consequences for the main character’s actions. She read multiple quotes from the book. She noted that library policy states parents or legal guardians have the authority to select the books for their children, but feels library access policies undermine parental authority.
- IV. Library Director Comments: Robin Shader stated the library serves the entire community, which means there is a responsibility to include different viewpoints in the collection to meet different needs. Librarians provide options and let people choose for themselves what they want to read. Parents have the right to choose for their own children but not

other people's children. She explained that the book received many positive reviews and that the publisher, reviewers, and librarians feel it is shelved in the correct location. Robin noted that taking quotes out of context serves to highlight controversial themes and ignores the author's intent and merit of the books. She feels there are many important themes in the book and that moving the book to the Young Adult section would hide it from the people who most want to read it.

- V. Public Comment: Sonja Seidler stated the book is pornographic, sexually explicit and should not be available anywhere in the library. She believes the book is here to destroy children and confuse them. She claims the books are here for "evil purposes" and to groom children and ruin their lives.

Ashley Burlon states that her mother would not like the book, but she would not want to parent other children. Her opinion does not change the fact that many others can view the content differently. Librarians have to be objective. She has dealt with other book reconsiderations in the past, and that any content can be taken out of context. She also talks about the grooming quote from Ms. Seidler and how librarians do not groom anyone.

Michelle Brown states she has been involved with many book reconsiderations. She believes there is an agenda that is destroying kids. She thinks that the parents are not aware of what the kids are checking out, and that books like this should be moved to a different section and only checked out by the parents.

- VI. Applicant Closing Comments: Ms. Alley states she wants to relocate the book, not remove it. She agrees that some children and parents should have the right to find the book. Her concern is, that in its present location, it can be found by children without parental permission.

- VII. Library Director Closing Comments: Robin stated that librarians do not restrict access due to disagreement with a specific viewpoint; they provide access and allow the public to decide what they want. She states that people have every right to pick it up and check it out, or put it down and choose something else.

- VIII. LAC Member Discussion: The chairman opened discussion at 1:25 pm. Jeff stated that he understands some people may find the book appropriate, and others will not. He is concerned that children may have access without a parent and this could lead to problems for the child, such as being bullied in school. He noted that the author is considered controversial and her books are frequently challenged. Jeff wants the book at a place in the library where the parents can make this decision for their kids. Jeff states when he Googles books for children, the books by Alex Gino do not pop up. And when you Google the book it states middle schoolers should be reading it, not younger. Jeff is concerned with the wide range of grade levels included in each section of the library; 3-7<sup>th</sup> grade and 7-12<sup>th</sup> grades. He asked if others would read this book to their children. Crystal said that she had discussed this with her daughter.

Jeff is also concerned about the secrecy and some of the quotes that involve "lying" and "sneaking" stuff from parents. He is alarmed that the book is encouraging kids to hide stuff from their parents and be defiant. Crystal says that the other popular children books

like Harry Potter and Percy Jackson also feature defiant protagonists and challenges to authority.

Fran described a recent interaction she witnessed between children in about 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Kids want to talk about gender issues with each other. She does not want to deny access to information, since some children are afraid to talk to parents. They use friends, internet, and the public library as sources of information.

Kendall also spoke about the secrecy and defiance point, and how children feel the need to be secretive.

Crystal feels that the parent is going to be aware of what the children are checking out.

There was a question related to the library card policy, and Robin clarified that children under 16 must have parental permission to get a library card but, once they have a card, they can use a card without the parent being present.

Mary stated that there's been a shocking change on how gender issues have been discussed at such a young age, compared to her childhood. And how computers give children unbelievable access. She was impressed with how the book models kindness and support. She suggested that a parent might want to read this to a child if the child had a friend in this situation.

The discussion was closed at 1:45 pm.

- IX. **LAC Vote: Kendall Middlemas Henley moved to retain the book in the Youth Services Department. Fran Davis seconded the motion. The motion carried 4-1.** Crystal Grey-Hewett abstained from the vote since she participated in the original reconsideration process.

Gerry Wilson – Yay

Kendall Middlemas Henley – Yay

Jeff DiBenedictis – Nay

Mary Gibson – Yay

Fran Davis- Yay

Crystal Grey-Hewett - Abstained

- X. **Adjournment:** 1:46 pm