



## MICHIGAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

### Book Rating Systems and Labelling in Public Libraries Statement of Principle

Libraries are vital repositories of diverse viewpoints, ensuring that a broad spectrum of ideas are accessible to all. The inclusion of titles in the collection does not equal endorsement by the library. Rating systems and labels, created by individuals or organizations to guide users about the suitability of materials, pose significant challenges to the principles of intellectual freedom that libraries uphold.

The Michigan Library Association (MLA) endorses library policies with objective finding aids, which help users locate materials by subject or genre, describing the content in the context of the whole work. We oppose the use of rating systems that endanger intellectual freedom by the endorsement of specific perspectives that infringe on informed choice.

**Example:** The underlying assumption of rating systems is that certain individuals or groups can determine what is appropriate or inappropriate for others, and that users require guidance in selecting materials. Public libraries can't legally use rating systems to justify restricting access or determining the appropriateness of content in any given materials – this would be considered an infringement of First Amendment rights. Many have suggested instituting a rating system like the Motion Picture Association (MPA) rating system (G, PG, PG-13, R, NC-17, non-rated). To be clear, the MPA rating system is a voluntary system that is not enforced by law; films can be exhibited without a rating and are subjective suggestions and have been criticized as having inconsistent standards. The MPA rating is, and has been intended only as, a guide and never as a legal mandate.

Implementing an aged-based ratings system can imply that the library endorses or favors particular viewpoints, values, or beliefs, potentially restricting access based on subjective judgments about what is deemed appropriate for various audiences. This approach can stigmatize works that represent diverse perspectives or experiences, suggesting that some viewpoints are less valuable or acceptable than others as well as be a costly burden on tax dollars.

Libraries should not adopt, enforce, or endorse rating systems, as these systems often serve as tools of censorship. Ratings reflect the subjective opinions of reviewers who may have moral, political or religious agendas. Professional librarians or educators are trained to assess materials based on diverse educational needs, interests, and experiences. Public libraries rely on authors, publishers and professional book reviewers, as well as their education and training, to guide the designation and classification of age appropriateness for all materials and to place these materials in the appropriate section of their library. Materials are normally categorized by Adult, YA/teens, children, graphic novels, and movies to name a few.

In conclusion, libraries should resist adopting or endorsing rating systems and labels that could undermine their commitment to providing unrestricted access to diverse viewpoints. Libraries should focus on maintaining a neutral stance, allowing individuals to make their own informed choices.