

MALINDA LO

March 11, 2025

Instructional Materials Review Committee
South Carolina Department of Education
via e-mail

Dear members of the Instructional Materials Review Committee:

My name is Malinda Lo, and I'm the author of several critically acclaimed and bestselling young adult novels, including *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*, which is currently under review by your committee. I'm writing to you not only as the author of this book, but as a concerned American citizen who believes strongly in our First Amendment.

Last Night at the Telegraph Club was the winner of the 2021 National Book Award for Young People's Literature, the Stonewall Book Award, the Asian Pacific American Award for Literature, the Kids' Choice Awards Teen Book of the Year, and over over two dozen more honors and awards. It's a coming-of-age novel about a Chinese American girl discovering her identity as a lesbian in 1950s San Francisco. I'm a Chinese American lesbian myself, and when I was a teen growing up in the 1980s and '90s, I often felt alone and confused. I didn't have access to books like this that would have helped me to better understand who I was. That's why I write books about LGBTQ+ and Asian American characters. I'm writing the books I needed as a teen.

Since *Telegraph Club* was published, many LGBTQ+ and Asian American readers have contacted me to tell me how much this book meant to them. Seeing yourself in a book can be a transformative and empowering experience. One reader wrote to tell me, "Your books helped me love and accept myself." A Chinese American reader wrote, "I feel so seen. Perhaps a little bit too seen, as I am on the verge of tears." A teen from Nashville told me, "it means a lot to see people like me in literature, written by people like me."

I'm an immigrant who came to the United States with my family from China when I was a child, and we settled in Boulder, Colorado. I grew up knowing that we came here to escape the oppression of the Chinese Communist government, which does not allow freedom of expression or the freedom to read. This is why I've always valued our First Amendment rights. The possibility that my book could be banned across the entire state of South Carolina alarms me because censorship goes directly against the ideals of our country.

I urge you to trust the judgement of your local teachers and librarians, who selected my book — and many others — for their school libraries based on their professional judgement and training. While not every book is for every reader, every reader deserves the freedom to choose what they wish to read, not to have those rights taken away from them by the state. I hope you will take this opportunity to support our fundamental rights and freedoms as Americans. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Malinda Lo