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PRESS RELEASE from Jessica Ruffcorn along with other concerned citizens:

Local citizens attempted on at least three occasions to negotiate book placement policies involving age inappropriate sexually explicit materials in our children's section of the library (ages 1-17). All requests were to relocate, not ban books. Having failed in these efforts, it became necessary to resort to the petition process to dissolve the Columbia County Rural Library District (CCRLD). It is important to note that the petition is to dissolve the taxing district and not the library per se. The current CCRLD is approximately 15 years old. However, for about 70 years prior to the formation of the district, the City of Dayton operated the Dayton Memorial library. When the City of Dayton gave their building and materials to the newly formed district it was with a written agreement that in the event that the DISTRICT were dissolved, "the Dayton Memorial Library building and the real property the building is on, the pre-annexation collection, all fixtures, and all equipment that is a part of the building and future Hedwig Davis, Peabody, and Delany Trust income would return to the City at no cost, so that the City could resume providing library services to the City of Dayton." The RCW does state that if the district dissolves, the (post Dayton Memorial Library) books and media would be removed and distributed to other libraries. The question could be raised with the Attorney General's office whether the books and media could just revert to our former Dayton Memorial library.

Approximately 18 months ago, residents of Columbia County noticed sexually explicit books in our children's library. Nobody could locate any local citizens who requested these books be placed in our library. As a former librarian, I, as well as others, began to protest. However, the number of books only continued to grow in our small library to well over 100. We petitioned the board to move books, but no action was taken. We learned that the board does not allow questions to be asked at their meetings, only comments may be made. This is even though their only stated mission is "The CCRLD is dependent on the trust of its community to successfully achieve its mission." In over one year of constant requests, the library board refused to discuss policy. During our research, we learned that many parents now are preventing their children from entering the library, defeating the purpose of a 'community' library. Citizens were upset at how their tax dollars were being used. Research found that the City Library operated a limited services library on much less money. CCRLD received \$472,600 tax dollars just this year alone (2023).

Others have learned, and shared, that the library has an advantage in the hierarchy of the state \$5.90 tax limit and can and has collected money that can infringe upon other tax districts such as the hospital district. Furthermore, residents have suggested that their overall tax dollars might be better spent supporting a swimming pool tax district rather than inappropriate media for children.

Although I supported the petition and presented it to the county auditor, I did not collect any signatures. In fact, I will not be able to vote as I live in the city. It is doubtful that many city residents were aware that when they released control to the CCRLD, by voting to join the district, that they would also give up their opportunity to vote in the event of dissolution. It is also important to note that the reason the incorporated voters do not get a vote in the dissolution is because the RCW gives them options to un-annex from the district, to form a contract with another district, or start their own library. At this point, the only option for unincorporated voters is to dissolve the district. The Neighbors United for Progress PAC have filed a lawsuit that would remove the right of the citizens in the unincorporated county to petition and vote in this matter.

We have learned that CCRLD was only one of many libraries across the nation which was experiencing challenges to the placement of sexually explicit books in their children's section. Last year the American Library Association reported that more books were challenged than any time in their history. Neighboring library boards, such as Boundary County, Idaho voted four to zero to revise their policies after citizen challenges.

Most residents support a library, but we do not want one with policies that do not build trust nor engage its citizens with their concerns. We face challenges, we seek local control, we seek best use of all our tax dollars, and we demand protection for our children.