The faculty of the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry encourages our Board of Trustees to publicly condemn the fine levied against the College of Charleston for selecting the book “Fun Home” for the College Reads! Program. This award-winning book was an excellent academic selection: it challenged our students to expand their horizons beyond a narrow viewpoint and helped to develop informed citizens who will not allow intolerance, bigotry, or homophobia to drive their actions. The overreaction to this book selection demonstrates the need for such literature. Board of Trustees members have been invited to participate in the selection of future College Reads! books in the same way as others on campus participate, but we hope they will not position themselves as censors at the end of the process. As the Board of Trustees represents an arm of the South Carolina legislature, such censorship would blatantly and dangerously violate academic freedom. In our department, the curriculum includes evolution, discussions of climate change, causes of pollution, and other topics that evoke strong political or religious passions. We would like to be confident that our Board will argue for our right and responsibility to teach our students about these topics, even if members of the legislature disagree. If academic discussion is stifled to exclude unpleasant, controversial, or alternative views or lifestyles, then we cannot adequately fulfill our role in educating an informed and reasoned citizenry.

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Pam Riggs-Gelasco
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