Anoka County issued the following statement to 5 EYEWITNESS NEWS:

“Anoka County’s general county practice and expectations of all employees has always been to not display political signage, endorse groups or political organizations, or specific policies/platforms, even in their private workspace.

“The internal email communication about summer displays and messaging came from the Library Management Team because staff requested guidance on what may not be appropriate. There was general county administration guidance on what libraries should avoid to maintain a neutral, welcoming message to all staff and patrons, which includes BIPOC, families of law enforcement, LGBTQIA+, conservative and progressive visitors, etc. We feel it’s important our libraries be a civic group, not a political group.

“Anoka County libraries strive to reflect our community and the individuals we serve. A day or two after the internal email was distributed, the American Library Association (ALA) designated June as Rainbow Book Month, and our libraries have the opportunity to participate by creating displays celebrating authors and writings that reflect the lives of the LGBTQIA+ community, much like February is used as an opportunity to celebrate Black History Month with displays and books highlighting BIPOC and authors. We will continue to encourage library displays celebrating Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage in May, Indigenous Month in June and Women’s History Month in March.

“Anoka County believes that libraries are meant to be content neutral spaces where the public can access materials to further their own education and personal enjoyment. To promote one political or social cause over another would undermine that goal of content neutrality. Our library system provides a wide range of materials that are available to Anoka County residents, including many titles that represent the experiences of minority groups. The Library has not removed from circulation any title or piece of reference material. To characterize the Library communication as censorship grossly misrepresents that term and discredits the real victims of censorship, like imprisoned authors and truly oppressed people. Libraries are open places designed to provide education and enlightenment to the public, not a platform for individuals within the library system to promote their own social beliefs or ideologies.

“This was guidance that our library teams were asking for and has been difficult to communicate with clarity. There are many misleading statements that are surfacing in social media and emails, and the team members who have been the most vocal have never reached out to the director or management team to discuss ways to move forward.”