

I am writing to oppose HB 1205. While I am a librarian with a Masters Degree in Library and Information Science, I work in a federal library that does not receive any state funding, so I am writing as a concerned citizen and library user rather than as a librarian, but I am still using my library education and experience to offer insights. I would like to offer some clarification on how public libraries operate, explore the rights of parents and how they fit into this issue, and point out that the bill violates constitutional rights.

The bill seems to assume that the existence of materials pertaining to sex endanger children when in public libraries. Children are not permitted unsupervised access to public libraries. If a child has wandered into a teen or adult area, it is because their parent or guardian has allowed them to do so. If the parent did not want the child to be in that section, then the child's wandering was clearly due to a lack of parental supervision that is in violation of library policy. Children are also not permitted to hold library cards unless their parents have signed a form to allow it. Children cannot access any library materials that their parents disapprove of unless that parent has been negligent in supervising their child's library use which is a deliberate choice made by the parent. Library staff are not responsible for anything a child does or looks at in a library. The parents are the only ones who can take that kind of responsibility.

A library serves all members of its community. Our communities have LGBTQIA+ families, parents who support their LGBTQIA+ children, parents who want to raise their children to be tolerant of LGBTQIA+ people regardless of their own orientations, and parents who don't consider the sex education provided by schools to be sufficient. All of these have a right to find materials that support them at their public library.

Public libraries are not only for those who want to raise their children in a particular way. Parents who do not want their children to encounter materials pertaining to LGBTQIA+ people, sex education, or adult materials need only expend the effort to communicate with their children and to supervise their access to media including inside public libraries. There are actually parents who do just that. Librarians encounter both parents who ask for help finding LGBTQIA+ materials and parents who ask for help to find materials that don't contain content that they disapprove of, and librarians help both groups of parents find what they need.

Libraries can't support a diverse population by removing materials, including those to which someone might object. To take the children's picture books as an example, some people object to picture books that contain LGBTQIA+ people or people of color. Others object to materials that contain only white, straight, cis-gendered people, so in order to satisfy both groups by removing materials, the library would have to get rid of all picture books containing humans. (Actually, by the letter of this law, libraries would have to remove all books portraying humans because straight and cis-gendered are sexual and gender identities.) That leaves us with the plant, animal, and inanimate object books. Most of those have animals, plants or inanimate objects that are anthropomorphized (have human characteristics like the bears in Goldilocks), and some people object to that as inconsistent with reality, so if we remove all of those, we're left with a tiny number of naturalistic animals books that mostly aren't very interesting, and there are so few that you might as well not have a library. Removing all potentially objectionable books is neither possible nor desirable. Instead, libraries support a diverse population by trying to ensure that there is something for everyone.

There are some that have the strange idea that libraries only have material for liberal families. In actuality, libraries also deliberately purchase material to support all kind of families, including conservatives. Materials by and about LGBTQIA+ people and people of color are a tiny minority

percentage in our library's collections. Logically, if the library's community is, for example, 20% LGBTQIA+, the library perhaps should contain 20% LGBTQIA+ materials. In actuality, most libraries have around 0-5% LGBTQIA+ materials. These materials are comparable to the non-LGBTQIA+ in terms of age appropriateness. A children's picture book featuring, for example, two fathers and their daughter contains no more implied sexual content than a children's book featuring a male father, a female mother, and their daughter. A parent can easily identify the difference by looking at the description either on the flap of the book or in the library catalog or just by paging through it.

When a Library purchases materials, librarians use professional reviews and various other sources to select materials aimed to both represent and appeal to the library's members. Librarians adhere to a code of ethics that requires them to do their best to put aside their personal beliefs and instead consider the needs of all sectors of their community. If a librarian purchases materials that are not wanted by the community, as shown by a lack of individuals borrowing that material over a particular span of time (how long varies depending on the library and the type of material), then the materials are removed. If there were truly no need or demand for LGBTQIA+ and sex education materials in our libraries, they would be removed due to lack of check-outs.

Parents who want their children to have access to LGBTQIA+ materials do so because they want their children to grow up happy and healthy. Numerous studies have shown that LGBTQIA+ teens, in particular, are much more likely to attempt or commit suicide than their peers. The feeling that there is something wrong with them is often a major factor in their unhappiness. Not having materials for them in libraries and bookstores sends them the signal that no one cares about them. That the way they were born was wrong or unacceptable. (There is no scientific basis for the common idea that exposure to LGBTQIA+ materials makes anyone LGBTQIA+. There is a lot of historical evidence that LGBTQIA+ people have always existed even though books about them have been few and difficult to access until relatively recently. While determining the cause of sexual and gender identity is still very much a work in progress, there is evidence that it might have to do with changes that occur prenatally.) Before the late 20th Century, most of the very few books about LGBTQIA+ people had pervasively negative messages and implied or stated that LGBTQIA+ people had no hope of happiness. Many older LGBTQIA+ people have reported that this lack of positive messages caused them to contemplate or attempt suicide in their youths.

Parents who want their teenagers to have access to sex education materials at their public library do so because books can provide more accurate and reliable information than online sources, and there have been studies that show that teens who are given factual and comprehensive sex education actually start having sex later than their abstinence-only peers. They also are less likely to contract a sexually transmitted disease, experience or cause teen pregnancy, or be involved in sexual or relationship violence. These parents feel that it is impossible to protect their children from the world but that it is possible to arm them against some of the troubles they may encounter. This attitude has always been around, but it has become increasingly common. The opposite approach has, after all, not had a very good success rate over the last few thousand years. Realistically, a teen who is curious about sex will find a way to find out about it. If they aren't permitted access to accurate, reliable, materials, they will turn to their peers (including by experimenting the old fashioned way), the internet (where teens (and adults) often struggle to identify the difference between reliable and unreliable sources), and pornography. Neither locker room talk nor pornography tend to emphasize the importance of consent or safe-sex (hence the higher statistics of STDs, pregnancy, and violence among abstinence-only teens). Unless things have changed considerably since I was in school, sex education offered by schools is neither comprehensive nor necessarily accurate (I hope it's more accurate nowadays. My teacher said

that condoms didn't protect against STDs which, in retrospect, makes me wonder if some of my classmates decided their wasn't a reason to use them and so did contract STDs).

In addition to looking for material that provides a more comprehensive and accurate sex education than their child is likely to get in school, parents often turn to libraries for sex education materials when their child is not developing according to the school schedule or because the parent is choosing to home school their child. Public schools usually teach about puberty, and particularly, periods, when kids are in the 5th grade. Some girls get their periods as early as 8, and it isn't uncommon for them to get their period before the 5th grade. Some parents want their children educated about puberty and periods before 5th grade and others are trying to perform catch-up after their daughter freaked out and thought she was dying due starting her periods earlier than her parents had expected. I remember helping a panicked single father in this situation a few years ago. He didn't feel either comfortable or qualified to help his child, so he turned to the library.

Sex education materials found in libraries are not textbooks per se, but they're usually categorized similarly by age appropriateness from the "mommy and daddy have a special cuddle and then a baby grows in mommy's stomach" and "tell an adult you trust if another adult touches you anywhere from your shoulders to knees" type for young children through the "what's happening to my body" puberty books through to more detailed information for older teens and even more detailed information and advice for adults. Please note that "older teens" includes individuals aged 18-19 who, by law, are old enough to consent to sex and even get married and have children. Opponents of sex education tend to assume that books for much older audiences are being accessed by much younger children. Again, if a child has wandered into an adult and teen section, it's because their parent has violated the library rules by failing to supervise their child.

In addition to impinging on the rights of parents, the proposed law also impinges on the rights of adults reading for themselves. Freedom of speech may be a little controversial when applied to children, but it is enshrined in the constitution and case law for adults. Do I need to discuss in detail why an adult might want to learn about LGBTQIA+, enjoy a romance book, look up the symptoms of something going wrong (or right) with their reproductive system, or learn a new way to please their spouse?

I also have a few questions for consideration:

If this law were passed, who would be considered responsible when someone finds a lewd picture left on a table or in a book? Usually, it's immature teen boys who draw these images, but how do you ascertain which one did it?

One of the most banned books in America at present is "Gender Queer" an autobiographical graphic novel for adults by Maia Kobabe about their journey in realizing that they are non-binary and asexual. Does non-binary count as a gender identity considering it is a rejection of gender identity? Although I haven't read it myself, it's my understanding it has maybe two graphic images in a lengthy book, and the book is well regarded for it's artistic merit, so would it be censored if this law were passed?

If we consider been non-binary to be a gender identity, then doesn't this bill ban all pictures of angels? According to old testament scholars, angels don't have a gender.

Again, straight is a sexual identity, and cis-gendered is gender identity, so this law bans all materials depicting humans (with the possible exception of non-binary ones). That would include the picture of the author on the flap of your favorite book series. Is that really what anyone wants?