

Chairperson, members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, here on behalf of the Fargo Human Rights Commission to testify regarding HB 1256, and I urge you to vote do not pass on this bill.

The Fargo Human Rights Commission consists of [eleven volunteer members](#) who are nominated by the Mayor and appointed by the City Commission. Each serves a three-year term. The Human Rights Commissioners represent a broad range of racial, religious, ethnic, social, economic, political and professional groups.

Our mission is: The Fargo Human Rights Commission provides leadership and education in areas of civil rights, to eliminate discrimination against persons because of color, creed, religion, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or marital status. It encourages adherence to civil rights through education, conciliation, and mediation. It identifies human and civil rights-related concerns of the public and recommends policies to the board of city commissioners that protect and preserve individual rights.

At its February, 2023 commission meeting, the assembled commission members voted unanimously on a resolution standing in opposition to the numerous bills targeting our Transgender community.

HB 1205 does not specifically address books or material regarding LGBTQ individuals. It is, however, within the larger context of the number of bills that seek to restrict rights of, to even attempt to erase the existence of members of the LGB and particularly members of the Transgender community, that the broad and vague language of this bill could disproportionately be used to remove books with an LGBTQ theme from our public libraries.

Further, PEN America, a literary and free expression organization, identified in a report released on Monday at least 50 groups at the national, state or local level that have advocated for book bans in recent months.

Many of these efforts seek to pull books with LGBTQ characters or themes – think Maia Kobabe’s “Gender Queer” or George M. Johnson’s “All Boys Aren’t Blue” – and are part of a broader, conservative-led movement to chisel away at the rights and status of LGBTQ Americans.

In the 1970s in particular, there was a major movement from social conservatives to keep gay and lesbian teachers out of classrooms. There was a major statewide initiative in California. There was, of course, Anita Bryant in Florida.

The animus that was driving those campaigns was, *We need to keep gays and lesbians out of classrooms precisely because they’re an inherent danger to our children. They’re predatory. They’re recruiting.*

In many respects, what’s happening now isn’t a new invention.

How Book Banning Impacts Students. Those who are affected the most by book banning are the students in the classroom. When books are banned or challenged, the footing of the curriculum becomes unstable. By opening children up to places, people, and different cultures, books help children develop empathy for others. Oct 14, 2022

Books that are explicitly about LGBTQ topics, or have LGBTQ protagonists or prominent characters have been disproportionately targeted during the last nine months of bans, PEN

America found. Thirty three percent of all banned books—or 379 books—contained LGBTQ themes, including a subset of 84 titles that deal with transgender characters and topics.
Education Week, April 2022

Unfortunately, real experiences describe experiences in which this is not the case. Our YRBS suggests that many LGBTQ students feel unsafe at home (only 10% of LGBTQ youth speak to parents when feeling sad, hopeless, empty or angry); fortunately, many LGBTQ students look to school personnel for support (half of LGBTQ+ students turn to teachers or adults at school if they have a problem); data from homelessness find that a disproportionate number of homeless youth are LGBTQ who have been kicked out or who have run away from non-supportive families (20% of Trans high school youth reported being kicked, ran away, or abandoned).

Thank you,

Cody Severson

Fargo Human Rights Commission Chair