

March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023

From: Gabriela Balf, MD, MPH

**Re: In Opposition to HB 1205**

Esteemed Madam Chair Larson, Committee Members

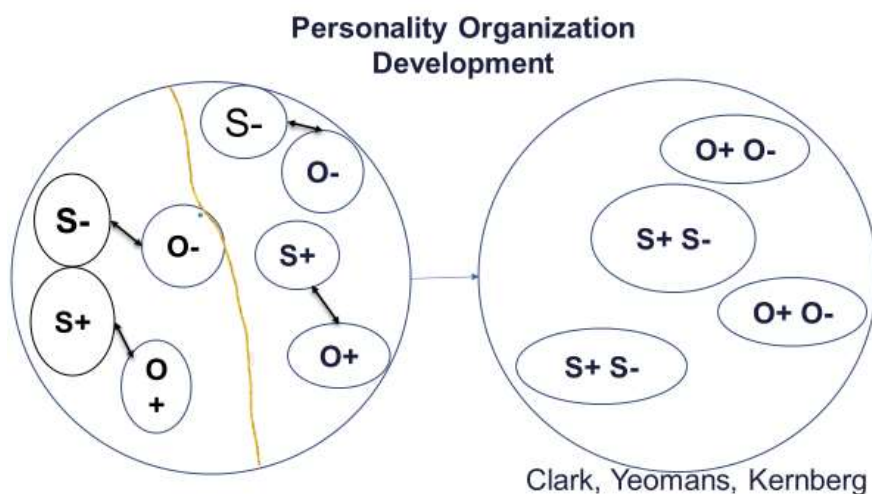
My name is Gabriela Balf, MD, MPH, I am a parent and a psychiatrist in Bismarck. I am an immigrant from a communist country, who came to America to have access to the best education in the world.

I am speaking for maintaining the children's book section carefully curated as it is now by the librarian specialists, and the adults' section rich with information for parents so they can educate their children.

Parents need the information to prepare their children for an increasingly complicated life. Banning certain subjects from open discussions keeps a population undeveloped psychologically. And, as history shows, outside policing does not work. The goal of education is to move the policeman from outside, inside. To bring in kids' minds and hearts the ability to control their impulses, empathize with others' pleas, and better understand and thus mindfully influence our community, our world.

How can one bring all these topics into their children's upbringing, when, in our busy lives, we don't have time for deep discussions every day? By ensuring they socialize with others, read, spend quality time on their screens, etc. Educating our children is not simple. One-liners don't cut it. The closest I can think of is "Love thy neighbor," but even the book containing this line will be banned from libraries should this bill pass.

We are born and wired to think in black and white. And it is our duty as humans to evolve. That process is called getting wise, becoming psychologically mature.



As we evolve, we realize that we (self S) have good parts (+) and bad parts (-), and others (other O) have good parts and bad parts. And we can tolerate and work with that.

Historically, books have been the way to understand and be kind to ourselves and others. That's why authoritarian regimes ban those perceived to counter their ideology. We all need to evolve from the fairy tale stage to finding out and dealing with the fact that we have flaws, and others too. Stories are a safe way to learn that: it is not about us; it is all happening in a fictional realm where the characters learn difficult lessons.

We cannot shield our kids from life. The treatment for anxiety is NOT protection from all triggers. Wars, tragedies, and traumas happen every day. Books that tell these stories teach us ways to prepare and be resilient. And it is our duty as parents to prepare our children to be mature and resilient.

Thank you for listening, and I stand for questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Balf' followed by a stylized arrow pointing to the right.

Gabriela Balf, MD, MPH  
Clin Assoc Prof - UND Dept of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science  
Narrative Medicine Program Student - Columbia Univ  
ND Psychiatric Society Past-President  
Diplomate, American Board of Internal Medicine  
Diplomate, American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology