

March 12, 2023

Dear Chair Larson and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Rev. Karen Van Fossan, and I urge you to vote Do Not Pass on HB 1205. Like many other people testifying in opposition to this bill, I am gravely concerned about implications for First Amendment rights, costs to taxpayers in the face of inevitable legal challenges, criminalization of librarians for doing the work of librarianship, and the long-term cultural and educational effects of legislated book banning. There are many voices addressing these particular issues today.

As a religious leader and ordained minister, I would like to focus my remarks on the reality the Bible itself would be subject to banning if this legislation were to pass.

Most commonly known is the Song of Solomon, which celebrates God's gift of human sensuality in very clear, if poetic, terms. Yet there are numerous biblical passages that are not so celebratory—and that would clearly fall within the parameters of this bill:

In Genesis 19:33-36, both of Lot's daughters conceive children with him.

In Genesis 35:22, Reuben has intercourse with Bilhah, his father's concubine.

In Genesis 38:2, Judah has intercourse with Shuah, and it is unclear whether the union is consensual.

In Judges 16:1, Samuel hires the services of a sex worker.

In 2 Samuel 13, Amnon rapes Tamar, his half-sister.

In Isaiah 13-15, there is talk of widespread gang rapes.

In Ezekiel 23:3, the language is so explicit, I don't even feel comfortable citing it in my testimony.

And that's not even all.

The Holy Bible doesn't only speak about God; the Bible also speaks about people—who are not perfect, who make mistakes, and who sometimes behave in ways that are contrary to God's direction. The book remains sacred to Christians like myself, not because every human being behaves in exemplary ways, but because there is much to learn about God from human stories. As human beings, we need human stories, including those found in Genesis 19:33-36, Judges 16:1, and then some. How else are we to learn how—and how not—to be fully human?

Please protect our access to human stories, such as those found in the Bible and many other materials in our public libraries. Thank you.