

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Judiciary committee for the opportunity to testify **in favor of SB 2360**. My name is Ruth Heley and I have been a resident of Dickinson, ND since 1994. I was an instructor of music for 22 years and am a current home school mother of a 13 year-old. I have extensive experience with working with teenagers and young adults and feel that their healthy development is of paramount concern to the future of the people of North Dakota.

I would like to clarify some of the discussion around this bill and what it is trying to solve for. I feel like the focus has occasionally been skewed so that we start to forget that **this bill is directed at the protection of minors**. Historically, state and national governments have passed numerous laws and concomitant regulations to ensure that this vulnerable population is protected. Minors are treated differently than adults by the law. I would note, just to name a few, that minors are not allowed to vote, own property, enter contracts, buy cigarettes, join the military, drink alcohol, are limited in how many hours they work, are generally tried in Juvenal court and may not have consensual sex (generally until age 16-18 depending on the state). Radio, television, and newspapers are all regulated to conform to decency standards in regards to obscenity for the public.

Why do we do this as a society? We do it because our children are a vulnerable population. They have incomplete reasoning skills and a lack of experience. Their minds and emotional maturity continue to develop into young adulthood. According to Psychology Today,

“In teen brains, gray matter in the cortex thins considerably. The number of synapses between neurons in the cortex is scaled back. This process of selective pruning is affected by the environment and helps make adolescence a time of particular susceptibility to outside influence....The prefrontal cortex, involved in planning and other executive functions, is still developing into early adulthood (with changes such as synaptic pruning), later than a number of other brain areas.”

As you can see, teens and children can be easily influenced by what is in their environment. We protect them as a society from certain choices because those choices can have irreversible consequences that harm them and others around them.

What kind of harm do these sexually explicit books present in our libraries and schools? These books advocate gender exploration to pubescent children and teens, a population that is only just getting to understand who they are and make sense of their body changes. They advocate illegal or risky behaviors—under-age sex, sexting, pornography for sexual education and entertainment, and anal toys. **What are the possible consequences?** STI/STDs, pregnancy, physical injury, sextortion, permanent sterility and emotional trauma.

This bill is not really about “the right to read”, censorship or LGBTQ issues. Adults are free to make such choices for themselves. Our goal as parents and educators should be to prepare our children for that eventuality, but at the same time to preserve as much as we can their opportunities to develop and grow in a healthy way without skewed influences. A child has the right to not have their person and healthy development encroached upon. I respectfully urge a **do pass for SB 2360**.