

Sandi L. Bates, MLIS, private citizen, Bismarck, ND
ADAMANTLY OPPOSED SB2360 – VOTE DO NOT PASS

The First Amendment guarantees our freedom of speech and right to access information. Censoring intellectual and academic freedom raises significant constitutional questions and issues and is bad public policy. Censoring also deeply impacts librarians' ability to perform their duties as set forth by academic institutions, local library boards and city commissions. Decisions and oversight of library materials collections should be left to the communities they serve.

You already have made your decision about how you will vote today so I'm not sure exactly why we are all submitting testimony other than it is the formality of the process.

Libraries are the great equalizers. Libraries do not care if you are short or tall or medium; fat or skinny or just right; smart, not so smart or trying desperately to improve yourself in whatever manner. It does not matter the pigmentation of your skin or whom you choose to love.

Libraries are the great equalizer. You can learn to sew clothes; explore another land real or imaginary; craft a quilt; build a Lego structure; write computer code; build your business by learning accountancy; find self help where no one judges you; and even fix your toilet.

Libraries are the last bastions of altruism. EVERYONE IS WELCOME!

Your beliefs are not checked at the door and neither should anyone else's beliefs. You can read the Bible, the Koran or any other religious text. You can read romance novels, thrillers or murder mysteries. You can be excited, terrified and find love. Everyone should have the right to read books of interest to them. This includes youth who are trying to figure life out – whether it is gender identity or sex or just how a human body works. The truth about this bill is it isn't really about protecting children from pornography. It is about keeping children from being exposed to any thoughts of homosexuality and anything speaking to transgender humans. There should not be a "naughty book area or room" where the reader is subjected to shame for looking at "those" library materials. Everyone who enters the doors of a library should be accorded the respect to browse whatever collection.

Libraries are the great equalizer. Libraries have built nations. Libraries make people more intelligent in so many ways – they make you book smart and common sense smart. They allow anyone to learn to critically think by examining opinions and material contrary to their own beliefs. By exploring reading and browsing a library, bumping into some foreign concept, people learn compassion and sympathy. They begin to see all their neighbors as humans who are only trying to find happiness, just like them.

Why anyone thinks it is a good thing to suppress and censor library materials – yes, it is censorship when you take away people's ability to find information in the library – is beyond my comprehension. Libraries provided me with countless hours of entertainment and knowledge. After 25 years working in another industry, I returned to college to earn a master's degree in library and information science. Throughout my years, I was a detective with Nancy Drew and flew on a broom with Harry Potter and his friends. I fixed my toilet, sink and dryer vent all on my own. I have sewed quilts that were later donated to a charity to give someone warmth. Are all those books available for purchase by me? Yes, of course. Could I afford to explore all those topics if I had to buy all of these books? Not possible. That's the beauty of public libraries. Altruistic through and through. That's why I love them!

You have listened to inflammatory material read from ONE BOOK. How many of you have actually read any of the other books on the challenged book list deemed pornographic? I wonder how many of you actually are active library users – not just card holders but visit your library on a regular basis.

I adamantly oppose SB2360 – no matter how it is amended or changed. It remains censorship and I am even more adamantly opposed to that. VOTE DO NOT PASS!