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Honorable Chairman Klemin  
Re: Testimony on HB 2360

Dear Chairman Klemin and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am providing this personal testimony in opposition to HB 2360. My name is Jan Selle Schmidt. I have had the honor to be a Library Media Specialist in North Dakota for 28 years. I spend my days co-teaching with classroom teachers, assisting students in research and creating digital products, and helping students develop critical thinking skills. I also assist students in selecting reading materials for research and personal interests in the library.

Books help kids feel understood when they see themselves in a character; books help them explore new worlds and experience different cultures. Banning books based solely on sexual content is dangerous, without considering the work as a whole. Under this bill, books students have connected with, will be removed because of one word, sentence, paragraph, picture or scene. When excerpts from books are read out of context, they sound shocking and appalling. Reading excerpts out of context can be misleading, as the whole story may reveal a character who has overcome significant challenges and provide inspiration or comfort to the reader.

Furthermore, students and teachers need to have access to books about suicide, depression, sexual abuse and anxiety. Our North Dakota kids are dealing with these issues on a daily basis. Books open doors and offer solutions or empathy for those who have experienced tough situations. Sexual content in literature is also often used as a tool to explore important themes and issues related to identity, relationships and personal growth. From an educator's point of view, this bill will further limit educators' already restricted access to materials due to cost and availability.

The current bill suggests librarians read and evaluate each book for any reference, in words or pictures, to a long list of criteria. It is not possible to read every title in a library and classroom. In most library collections, we try to have at least 20 books per student (at a minimum). Reading every page in a 15,000+ title library is simply unrealistic. On top of managing the library collection, librarians are teaching ND state library and technology standards, supporting the classroom curriculum, assisting patrons, managing building technology devices, organizing events, running student groups, and planning reading programs. Content included in this bill is also not always easy to identify and what might be considered sexual content to one, may not be to another. Instead, we rely on book reviews, age ratings and summaries when selecting titles to purchase.

You may ask how books are chosen for a school library in the first place. School librarians choose books based on the curriculum needs first and then student interests. Before purchasing, they research titles, consult professional reviews and ensure age appropriateness before adding them to the collection. If a student requests a book from an older library, parent permission is required. Students often check out and return books that parents do not want their child reading, such as scary books, or books with witches etc. This does not mean the book should be banned. Instead, parents choose to have a conversation with their child and

then we help them find a book that better meets the families needs. Local school districts already have clear policies on selection and reconsideration of materials. Parents are encouraged to fill out a form if they feel a title is inappropriate. An impartial committee will then read the whole work, review the book and make a recommendation.

I believe in the innovative, progressive North Dakota that values local control and allows communities to choose school board members to reflect its values and develop policies that meet its needs. While it is important to consider parents' concerns, it's equally important to provide patrons access to information and foster critical thinking. Librarians are working hard to keep students safe and select appropriate materials for students. I urge you to vote against HB 2360.

Sincerely,

Jan Schmidt  
Library Media Specialist