

Representative Klemin and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

I have spent my entire career, nearly 30 years, in education as a classroom teacher, a professor of education and now a middle school librarian. Students (my kids) have always been at the heart of the millions of decisions I have made and will continue to make. It is with students in mind that I write in vehement opposition to SB 2307. While I oppose this bill in its entirety, for brevity's sake, I have chosen to focus primarily on the impact that SB 2307 would have on marginalized students, especially those who identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community.

In a 1990 article, preeminent children's and young adult literature scholar, Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop wrote about the concept of books as mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors. This concept is one that I, and many others, have embraced and sought to manifest. Dr. Sims Bishop asserts that readers need books that serve as mirrors in which they can see themselves and their identities. Books should also serve as windows allowing readers to look into lives, identities and worlds different from their own. And finally, books act as sliding glass doors which allow readers to step into other worlds; I conceptualize sliding glass doors as bridges that connect varying lives and realities. It is vital that students have access to books that serve as mirrors but it is just as important that students have unrestricted access to books that provide windows and sliding glass doors.

I share Dr. Sims Bishop concept and believe that it is the duty of school librarians, public librarians and classroom teachers to provide mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors for ALL of their students and patrons. This is not to say that I believe age inappropriate material should be provided in school and classroom libraries. In my current role as a middle school librarian I serve the approximately 8% of my students who identify as LGBTQIA+ as well as all of their peers who do not identify as part of this community. My LGBTQIA+ kids deserve to and need to see themselves reflected in the materials in our middle school library; just as it is important that my non-LGBTQIA+ kids see their "out" friends and classmates in their reading materials.

Unfortunately I believe that SB 2307 and its vague phrasing could have a disproportionate negative impact on books that feature LGBTQIA+ characters and topics. In SB 2307, Section 4.1a(2) it states that: "Explicit sexual material means any material which: is patently offensive to prevailing standards in the adult community in North Dakota as a whole with respect to what is suitable material for minors." Regrettably, in the time and society in which we currently exist, it is clear that many adults in North Dakota may find any materials, whether age appropriate or not, that feature LGBTQIA+ characters or topics as "patently offensive." It is my fear that these misguided "prevailing standards" will result in the removal of these vitally important materials from school, classroom and public libraries.

If SB 2307 passes and LGBTQIA+ literature is targeted it could be literal life or death. According to the North Dakota specific data on the Kids Count Data Center (link below), in 2021 62.8% of high school students who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row. By contrast only 31.4% of students who identify as heterosexual experienced those same sustained feelings of sadness and hopelessness. Additionally, in 2021 21.1% of high school students who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual reported attempting suicide one or more times during the previous 12 months while only 3.7% of their heterosexual peers reported the same. I can only imagine that these startling statistics will increase if SB 2307 passes and book shelves are wiped of any and all age appropriate materials relating to the LGBTQIA+ community.

It is not hyperbolic to state that books save lives. They provide mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors into ourselves, our identities, our surrounding society and our world. I fear that the passage of SB 2307 will shatter these mirrors and windows for marginalized populations and foster more misunderstanding and hate in the majority population towards the LGBTQIA+ community.

Sincerely,

Aimee Rogers, Ph.D.  
Grand Forks

Link to Kids Count North Dakota site:

<https://ndkidscount.org/uncovering-north-dakotas-youth-mental-health-landscape#:~:text=The%20teen%20suicide%20death%20rate,to%2013.7%20per%20100%2C000%20teens.>