

I am submitting testimony in opposition to SB2307.

I am deeply concerned about the implications of this bill and the ways it would require libraries to halt or alter services in order to comply. The terms of this bill related to relocating materials to places inaccessible to minors are vague enough that small libraries, especially those that are essentially one room, will find it difficult to comply. What if children must walk through areas of the libraries containing adult sections to get to a bathroom? What if story time takes place in a central area of the library from which all sections of the library are accessible? Spending taxpayer money on determining the boundaries of the language in this bill is a waste. Previous legislation from 2023 has already addressed alleged “explicit” materials in children’s collections. Libraries across the state complied with that bill. Why was that not enough?

The language used in this bill is about protecting children. Every librarian, teacher, and parent will agree that protecting children from harm is important, and that it is a practice that librarians, teachers, and parents already engage in. Our librarians and teachers know our kids and care about them deeply. They use that knowledge and personal connection to put books in their hands that will interest them and move them and help them learn and grow. They know that not every child reads at the same level or is ready for the same content or themes, and they use that knowledge when they purchase books and recommend books to kids. Parents are always welcome in that process and in those conversations, and many libraries provide parents with tools to help monitor what their kids are reading. Where you will meet resistance from me and many others, including parents and including the passionate and caring librarians and teachers that I know, is when the government attempts to step in and control those conversations. This bill infringes on the rights of parents, teachers, and librarians to work with their kids and students on choosing reading material that is appropriate and relevant and of interest. It also removes any opportunity we have to trust our kids with those decisions, too.

I acknowledge that nowhere in this bill is the word “censorship.” That may not be the intended purpose of the legislators who introduced this bill. But it will be the result as the threat of legal action causes librarians to self-censor what they purchase for and display in their libraries. The data shows that it is books with LGBTQ+ and/or BIPOC characters and authors that suffer most from legislation like this. These perspectives are not dangerous. These perspectives are important because they open our eyes to identities that may not be our own. They encourage empathy and acceptance. Instead, this bill succumbs to fear.

Our Republican-majority state legislature is supposed to support individual freedoms and small government. This bill restricts individual freedoms and represents extreme government overreach. Please give it a recommendation of “Do not pass.”

Sincerely,

Amanda Walch