

Opposition to Senate Bill 2307

3/15/2025

Dear Chairman and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

Disclaimer: I am a member of the Morton Mandan Public Library (MMPL) Board of Trustees. However, the following testimony reflects my personal views and does not represent any official stance of the MMPL or its Board of Trustees. I submit this testimony as a resident of North Dakota, a parent, and a public library patron.

I strongly urge you to give Senate Bill 2307 a DO NOT PASS. This bill is unnecessary, harmful, and a direct threat to North Dakota's public and school libraries, particularly in rural communities. It is a solution in search of a problem, and one that will create more harm than good.

Public libraries are one of the last true community spaces where people of all ages, backgrounds, and beliefs can come together to learn, explore ideas, and engage in civil discourse. They are vital institutions, especially in rural communities where access to information and resources is already limited. **SB 2307 threatens their ability to function effectively, imposes costly and impractical mandates, and worst of all, opens the door to criminal prosecution of library staff simply for doing their jobs.**

Think about your local public library. It likely has a children's section, but that section isn't walled off from the rest of the library. This bill would require libraries to physically close off any section containing a book with even a passing reference to anything sexually explicit. That means walling off entire young adult sections, restricting access to classic literature, and forcing staff to police what patrons can access. The financial and logistical burden of these changes would be devastating, particularly for rural libraries already operating on shoestring budgets.

This bill is nothing new. In 2023, Governor Burgum wisely vetoed SB 2360, a similar piece of legislation, recognizing that existing laws already provide a pathway to address concerns about library materials. That same year, HB 1205 was signed into law, mandating that libraries develop policies for reviewing and addressing concerns about materials deemed inappropriate for children. SB 2307 is not only redundant but an extreme overreach.

What's especially troubling is how this bill disproportionately harms small and rural libraries, many of which have minimal staff and tight budgets. Expecting them to monitor materials under vague, subjective standards—on pain of legal action—will create an environment of fear and self-censorship. Librarians should not have to weigh whether shelving an award-winning young adult novel or a classic piece of literature might land them in court. Fear of controversy will lead libraries to pull books preemptively, depriving our communities—especially young people—of meaningful and diverse literature.

Speaking of young people, SB 2307 could prevent teens from working or volunteering at their local library—a formative experience that fosters civic engagement, responsibility, and a love of learning. Who would be held legally liable if a teen employee shelves a book that an “interested individual” deems inappropriate? Rather than nurturing future readers and critical thinkers, this bill would strip young people of valuable educational opportunities.

And let's talk about Section 7, one of the most absurd and dangerous aspects of this bill. Under its provisions, *anyone*, including out-of-state activists with zero ties to our communities, could demand

that a North Dakota state’s attorney review a library’s materials, potentially triggering funding cuts or even criminal prosecution. Two of the individuals who testified in favor of this bill before the Senate Judiciary Committee weren’t even from North Dakota. Yet under this bill, they—and others like them—could dictate what our communities can and cannot read.

Let’s be clear: this bill exists because a single parent in a North Dakota school district didn’t like a book, followed the existing process to challenge it, and wasn’t satisfied when the answer was “no.” So instead of accepting that their personal standards are not universal, they’ve helped push through this legislative overreaction, forcing a one-size-fits-all restriction on every library in the state. This is not governance—it’s censorship, plain and simple.

We’re told this bill isn’t about banning books. That’s a lie. Even Senator Boehm admitted during testimony that libraries are already complying with the law that requires explicit materials to be moved to the adult section. But that isn’t enough. Proponents of this bill want these books moved somewhere “not easily accessible” to minors. That might sound reasonable until you consider the real-world consequences: for small libraries, the easiest way to comply is simply to remove the books altogether. And that, I believe, is the true goal—particularly for books that address LGBTQ+ topics or other subjects that make certain groups uncomfortable.

As a parent, I believe it is my job—not the government’s—to decide what my child reads. Parents already have the right to monitor their children’s library use and challenge materials through existing processes. We do not need legislation that criminalizes librarians and forces libraries to cater to the most easily offended among us.

And finally, I cannot believe I have to say this: NO ONE is exposing children to pornography in libraries. This is a bad-faith argument designed to drum up fear and push an ideological agenda. Librarians are professionals who take great care in curating collections appropriate for all patrons.

SB 2307 is a reckless, unnecessary piece of legislation that will do nothing but harm North Dakota’s libraries and communities. I urge you to vote DO NOT PASS. Let’s trust our librarians, respect parental rights, and uphold the principles of intellectual freedom that have long been the foundation of our public library system.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kara L. Geiger
Mandan