



March 18, 2025

Chairman Klemin and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Andrea Placher, and I am the President of the North Dakota Library Association (NDLA). The NDLA is a professional organization that represents library employees and supporters from various types of libraries, including school, public, academic, and special libraries throughout North Dakota. Our membership is diverse, comprising librarians, library staff, trustees, and friends from libraries of all types and sizes.

Today, I am testifying on behalf of our association in opposition to SB 2307. This bill is simply unnecessary, and I hope to demonstrate that today. Following the publicity libraries received during the 2023 legislative session, many of our citizens visited their community libraries. They witnessed firsthand what was truly happening and what their libraries were accomplishing. They discovered that North Dakota's libraries are exceptional and provide tremendous value to our communities!

To illustrate the increasing usage of our libraries, I would like to share North Dakota public library statistics from the last three years (2021-2023). As we are still at the beginning of the year, we have not yet gathered complete statistics for 2024. However, I have included data for the libraries for which we do have information (please see attached). This data not only demonstrates that our citizens are actively using their libraries, but also shows that our libraries are responsive to community needs by providing the resources that the public is requesting.

Libraries throughout the state have adopted policies and procedures established by their respective library or school boards. These guidelines help direct our purchasing, cataloging of materials, and provide a means for citizens to actively engage with their library's resources. The mission of libraries is to provide materials that reflect the diverse needs and interests of our communities.

There are several uncertainties in this bill that raise concerns and could result in unintended consequences, significantly hindering library operations in the state. The primary aim of this bill is to establish sections of libraries that are "inaccessible to minors." However, most libraries in North Dakota are smaller, one-room buildings, making it nearly impossible or prohibitively expensive to implement such changes. I would like to highlight our main concerns to help you understand.



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Limited Budgets

It is widely recognized that libraries do not generate revenue. Constructing walls, adding extra bathrooms in the children's area, and installing separate entrances will incur costs for the citizens of North Dakota. If these changes cannot be implemented, it may lead to the complete removal of children's materials from libraries.

Staffing

High school-aged employees are usually essential for keeping libraries open during nights and weekends. They typically handle tasks such as shelving books and checking materials in and out for patrons. To comply with this bill, most public libraries in our state would be prohibited from hiring staff aged 17 and under.

Bookmobiles

In addition to its physical library buildings, North Dakota has the benefit of 11 bookmobiles as well as additional outreach vehicles such as vans and book bikes. These resources primarily serve daycares, preschools, rural schools, nursing homes, assisted living centers, and community centers. It would be nearly impossible to carry only adult or children's collections, so we would be faced with the dilemma of choosing one over the other.

Overdrive, also known as Libby

The bill also includes online databases, one of the most popular being Overdrive, also known as Libby. This platform provides library users with access to tens of thousands of eBooks and audiobooks. The content available is very similar to what you would find in a physical library, offering a wide range of choices for all users. If this bill is passed, access would be denied to anyone aged 17 and under.

Programming

Programs are essential to library services; however, many libraries lack dedicated programming rooms and instead host Storytimes in the main areas. Consequently, every space within these libraries could be considered "accessible to minors."



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The primary concerns about implementing SB 2307 include several key issues. Notably, parents or guardians will no longer be able to accompany their children while they browse the aisles. Additionally, there are concerns about minors having access to public computers, the necessity for extra staff in the newly constructed areas, and other related matters.

Library staff in North Dakota are dedicated professionals who genuinely care about the communities where they serve and live. We take pride in curating our collections and providing essential resources to our patrons. The increasing numbers in material circulation, program attendance, library card holders, and overall library visits demonstrate that our communities not only use the library but also support them.

Thank you for considering the concerns of the North Dakota Library Association regarding SB 2307.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrea Placher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Andrea Placher
President | North Dakota Library Association