

Honorable Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me the privilege of submitting testimony on such a pertinent topic. My name is Autumn Richard, from Lefor, ND, and I plead with you to approve SB2307.

Everyone has the right to read; it is a freedom I enjoy daily and not to be taken lightly. And, this is the platform that is often used to argue upon placing any limitations upon readers. As an adult, I choose what I want to read and it is upon my discretion the level of intimacy or sexual language that I want to absorb. This same thought process is applied to what I watch and what is on my history browser on my laptop.

However, we do place safety protocol in place for minors. Minors are not allowed to enter an R rated movie without an adult; we rate all movies and television shows to inform not only the minor but the adult so that an educated limitation can be set, at the discretion of the adult. Minors have limited access to certain websites in both school and library settings; no minor can access pornhub at the library as there are safety measures in place.

SB2307 is requesting such safety limitations, but only for minors. Adults will still maintain their accessibility, as they should. These protocols are set to protect minors from negatively impacting their lives and wellbeing.

And the argument lies here: do these books negatively impact a minor's life and wellbeing? Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously said in 1964 in regard to pornography, "I'll know it when I see it." Well, I would go out on a limb here and say that Justice Stewart would be appalled by some of the content in our youth's library section today. And, using his approach, I know when I see 'it', too. But, let's not just use our opinions, because opinions are not facts and law should be centered on factual information.

I have looked over and read many books in the youth section of our library in Dickinson, ND. I can tell you that a book recommended for 8 and up displays both male and female genitalia and encourages anal play. (Sex is a Funny Word) Our library had a book up on display (Naked: Not Your Average Dictionary) that went in to disturbing detail about 'Anal Sex', 'Cunnilingus', and 'Fuck Buddies'. This book also encouraged Sexting, which is illegal in minors. I found a plethora of books that have explicit and sexual imagery, and others that had explicit language.

Adolescence occurs between ages 10 and 19 and is a crucial development period that influences health later in life. It's known that exposure to sex during this period, particularly before age 16, can have negative consequences.

A recent study indicates that the harm to children from being exposed to sexually explicit material and pornographic content can impact their mental health, life satisfaction, sexual behavior and attitudes, and contribute to pornographic-viewing patterns in adulthood.

Early exposure to sexually explicit material may prematurely sexualize a child, incite a child to experiment in order to understand what they saw, shape a child's expectation in relationships, and can possibly blur the boundaries and increase a child's risk of victimization.

These books may normalize child sex or desensitize children to sexual things. They may glamorize sex and teach explicit sexual vocabulary. These books also introduce high risk sexual behavior and may not include vital medical facts, such as the high std rate in such behavior.

Overall, early exposure to children, especially, interferes with healthy sexual development.

So, where do we draw the line? Some books are romance and do have sexual language, but are they pornographic? That is not for me to decide. But I do know I would want to err on the side of caution in the efforts to prevent minors from the negative effects of early exposure to sexual material. I would not want to realize, generations from now, that we have made a grave error and have not done our justice as a society in protecting our innocent, our youth.

“History will judge us by the difference we make in the everyday lives of children.” –Nelson Mandela. I pray we are not judged harshly.

Thank you

Autumn Richard