

March 17, 2025

RE: SB 2307

Dear Chairman Klemin and Committee Members:

My name is Ruth Heley, and I am a resident of Dickinson, ND. I am writing today in favor of SB 2307.

I am rather sorry that this bill has become necessary, however. I have been working on the local level with the Dickinson Area Public Library (DAPL) since the fall of 2022 by attending and filming the board meetings, putting in collection suggestions, writing recommendation forms, meeting with other concerned citizens, and speaking at the board meetings when the board finally granted that privilege. Change to reflect citizen input at the local level by our library has been slow and grudging.

The DAPL will be quick to tell you that their circulation is up and that their programming is highly rated in the state. What they are less eager to tell you about is the huge number of books they weed out every month and the thousands of new books they order each year to replace those removed from the shelves. A very small percentage of these new books will be patron requests, many of them denied by library staff for not having a proper "professional" review or having a publication date that falls before 2020.

Thinking about those thousands of new books that are ordered, one might well imagine that it takes a great deal of time for the librarians to order these items. It comes out in board meetings, however, that the librarians purchase a share of these books in pre-selected "packs" from the publisher. Essentially, those materials are rarely reviewed in advance, trusting the publisher's judgement. Going through what is on the shelves, I have observed poor scholarship, "woke" ideologies, and sexualized materials. If a patron doesn't feel these materials are in the best interest for her children or teens, she is free to write a reconsideration form. Well, at a limit of three reconsiderations per month, it might take a while for that patron to see much change in the quality of literature.

Thinking about the best interest of children and teens brings us to the crux of this bill. A public library is a public space. In other public spaces by law, we respect the developing emotional maturity of young people by not inundating them with sexual images. This respects parents by helping them to introduce sexuality to their children at a time when the child is ready. In the past, the library was a safe place for children to explore. The library staff will tell you that you should be present with your children to guide them in the library so they don't encounter offensive material. Certainly, this is a good thing to do. Yet, how can librarians lecture parents to be at the library to monitor their children's and teens' book choices, and at the same time have a policy that allows children 12 years and over to be unattended at the library? In fact, the Dickinson Public School bus drops children off at the library after school. Who is preventing these unattended children from pulling *The Nerdy and the Dirty* off of the shelves in the Young Adult section and going through it or wandering into the adult graphic novels section to run into *My Lesbian Experience with Loneliness* complete with line drawings of naked women on the cover (both available at DAPL)? Nothing, right now.

Thank you for your service to our state and for your time in reading this. I urge a DO PASS.