

Chairman Klemin and members of the Judiciary Committee, for the record my name is Robert Erbele and I am the Senator from District 28 serving 5 rural counties in the southcentral and south east part of the state.

This is one of the last bills that I would have considered signing onto in the past. Although I am against pornography and obscenity, and I support those bills limiting their scope when they are before us, I have always held that those standards need to be upheld and promoted at the local level, and I have always said that public dollars should go to public schools. Both of those philosophies have been severely challenged by what I have experienced this last fall regarding a book series that was brought to my attention by some of my constituents in my district. It was a very disturbing, and emotional journey that I walked with them. My constituent has a couple of frames from the book that was shared with me to this testimony to show what flipped my trigger. My moral compass is stronger than my philosophical opinions regarding local control and public schools.

When my constituents informed me that the Librarian and the Superintendent would not honor their request to remove the book I encouraged them to get a petition of support from the patrons of the district, which they did and had over 200 signatures in a very short time. Once the petition was in hand I personally called the Superintendent and the school board president to encourage them to honor the petitioners which was clearly a mandate stating their community values. Both saw nothing wrong with the book(s) and felt comfortable with their own kids reading the books, one said " kids are having sex anyway". To placate the citizens a book review committee was hastily assembled since the board did not formally have one in place and their reviews were presented to the board. I read those reviews and all were in favor to keep the books, the thing that was suspicious to me was that quite a few of them had the same narrative and seemed like they may have been AI generated. The special ed teacher said that she encourages her students to read graphic (cartoon style) books since they are easier to understand. A board member on the committee said he found the book pervasively vulgar, but was against banning books. Others said it was such a small percentage of bad words compared to the total of all the pages in the book and no genitals were shown.

I did attend the board meeting when my constituent got on the agenda to bring the request of the petitioners to the board. The room was full, probably close to 100 people. The teachers all stood in solidarity behind one of the faculty members who spoke in favor of the book, and no one other than my constituent was allowed to speak. The board took no action. One of the disheartening things I observed was that the faculty had encouraged some of the students of the school to attend and hold signs saying "No Book Bans"

What baffles me is why the school leaders would choose this hill to die on. It wasn't a solo wild eyed radical trying to disrupt the school. There was a significant group of citizens concerned about the welfare of the minds of their children. What I saw was the sexualization of our children, and a weaponization of children against their parents.

Why is a book of this nature so important? What is its redeeming social, or educational value? Can you sincerely tell me what I'm missing?

As I see it a book has no soul or feelings, it will not be hurt if it is not read. Any one can buy the book and put it on their coffee table if they so choose, but an educational institution funded by taxpayer dollars should not be buying books of a suspect nature, there are thousands of good beneficial books to choose for a public school.

Mr. Chairman, and committee members, everything in life comes from a seed, plants, animals, people and societal standards. Blessings come from seeds. Small seeds, or actions, of faithfulness, and obedience produce blessings, small seeds of disobedience, and tolerance of moral decline, leads to a corrupt society and all kinds of behavioral disorders that are so rampant today. Nothing starts out full grown.

I hope you can take this opportunity to study this bill, and if you see any changes that need to be made to make this a firm foundation to protect the hearts and minds of our young people, I ask you to do so.

Thank you for your time. My constituent is here today to give you her personal account of the ordeal she and her family have experienced.