

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing to oppose Senate Bill 2278, which proposes a study on requiring state agency libraries to retain original versions of materials when publishers release updated editions and to examine how artificial intelligence impacts library materials. While this bill may appear to address concerns about preserving the integrity of published works, it raises several significant issues that make it problematic and unnecessary.

Unfunded Mandate for the Study

The bill does not specify who would bear the costs of this study or how it would be funded. Without clear financial provisions, it risks imposing an unfunded mandate that could divert resources away from other critical legislative or educational priorities. Studies of this nature require significant time, staffing, and expertise. It is irresponsible to propose such a study without first addressing the financial and logistical burden it would place on legislative management and the libraries involved.

Overreach into Library Autonomy

Decisions about what materials to keep or remove from library collections should rest with librarians and other professionals trained in collection development and management. These decisions are made based on factors such as relevance, demand, space, and the needs of the community served by the library. The legislature should not insert itself into these decisions or attempt to dictate what libraries retain, as this undermines the professional judgment and independence of librarians. This type of overreach sets a dangerous precedent and could lead to further political interference in library operations.

Redundancy and Impracticality

Libraries are already well-equipped to handle questions of historical preservation. Many institutions retain original works or collaborate with archives and repositories to ensure access to earlier editions of materials when necessary. Mandating that libraries retain all original versions would create unnecessary redundancies. The bill fails to consider the practical realities of library operations, such as limited space and budgets. Requiring retention of outdated materials would place an additional strain on libraries without adding meaningful value to their collections.

Misplaced Legislative Priorities

It is concerning that the legislature is considering intervening in how libraries manage their collections rather than addressing more pressing educational or social issues. The focus should remain on supporting libraries with resources to serve their communities, not micromanaging their collection policies. Legislating what libraries must keep risks politicizing library collections, which should remain spaces of intellectual freedom and access to information.

Ambiguity in Artificial Intelligence Considerations

The bill introduces vague language about studying how artificial intelligence affects library materials, but it does not clarify the scope or objectives of this analysis. This creates unnecessary complexity and opens the door to speculative discussions without a clear connection to library practices.

Senate Bill 2278 is an unfunded and unnecessary proposal that overreaches into library operations, undermines professional autonomy, and risks politicizing decisions about collections. Libraries are already adept at preserving materials and adapting to changes in technology without legislative interference. Instead of pursuing this study, the legislature should focus on providing libraries with the resources they need to serve their communities effectively.

I urge the Committee to reject this bill and commit to supporting, rather than micromanaging, the vital work of North Dakota's libraries.

Sincerely,

Kara L. Geiger
Mandan, ND