

I am submitting testimony in opposition to SB2307.

The language used in this bill is about protecting children from “sexually explicit materials.” Every librarian, teacher, and parent will agree that protecting children from harm is important, and that it is a practice that librarians, teachers, and parents already engage in. Our librarians and teachers know our kids and care about them deeply. They use that knowledge and personal connection to put books in their hands that will interest them and move them and help them learn and grow. They know that not every child reads at the same level or is ready for the same content or themes, and they use that knowledge when they purchase books and recommend books to kids. Parents are always welcome in that process and in those conversations, and many libraries provide parents with tools to help monitor what their kids are reading. Where you will meet resistance from me and many others, including parents and including the passionate and caring librarians and teachers that I know, is when the government attempts to step in and control those conversations. This bill infringes on the rights of parents, teachers, and librarians to work with their kids and students on choosing reading material that is appropriate and relevant and of interest. It also removes any opportunity we have to trust our kids with those decisions, too.

I acknowledge that nowhere in this bill is the word “censorship.” That may not be the intended purpose of the legislators who introduced this bill. But it will be the result. When a class B misdemeanor can be brought against a teacher or librarian for providing “sexually explicit material” to a minor—that’s a scare tactic and will result in teachers and librarians self-censoring their collections. Another component to consider is that the process of buying and getting books into the hands of a minor is, in many libraries, not the responsibility of a single person. Who will be charged with the misdemeanor if a case is brought forth—the librarian who recommended the book to a patron? Or the part-time circulation assistant who checked the book out to the patron, and who may be a minor themselves? Or the library director who approved the funds to purchase the book? Or all three? I would ask the legislature to consider, how is that sustainable? How is that a responsible use of our justice system and the taxpayer dollars that support it? How does that foster an atmosphere of trust and respect for professional expertise that new teachers and new librarians will want to work in?

Additionally, I am concerned about how libraries will be forced to comply with this bill. If they cannot relocate material to an area that isn’t accessible by kids, some libraries may have to restrict access to their building. I have read about libraries in Idaho that have had to do this and it breaks my heart.

This bill is not going to do anything to protect children. It’s going to stunt their curiosity and their access to books and literature that challenge them, that make them think, and that help them grow.

Please oppose this bill and do not pass it.

Thank you.