

Opposition to Senate Bill 2307**2/7/2025****Dear Chairman and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,**

Disclaimer: I am a member of the Morton Mandan Public Library (MMPL) Board of Trustees. However, the following testimony reflects my personal views and does not represent any official stance of the MMPL or its Board of Trustees. I submit this testimony as a resident of North Dakota, a parent, and a public library patron.

I strongly urge you to give Senate Bill 2307 a **DO NOT PASS**. This is a misguided and unnecessary piece of legislation that poses a direct threat to the operations of North Dakota's public libraries, especially those in our rural communities. This bill seeks to impose broad and vague restrictions on library materials, effectively undermining the very purpose of libraries as places of learning, exploration, and community enrichment. It is a solution in search of a problem—one that will create bureaucratic nightmares, impose undue financial burdens, and limit public access to essential resources.

Public libraries are one of the last true community spaces where people of all ages, backgrounds, and beliefs can come together to learn, explore new ideas, and engage in civil discourse. They are invaluable institutions, especially in our small and rural communities, where access to information and resources is already limited. **SB 2307 threatens the ability of these libraries to function effectively, imposes unnecessary financial and operational burdens, and, most concerningly, opens the door for criminal prosecution of librarians simply for doing their jobs.**

I want you to picture your local public library. Most likely, there's a separate children's section, but it isn't closed off to the rest of the library. This bill would force your library to physically close off from minors any section of the library that contains a book or other materials that has any mention of something sexually explicit. Imagine the logistical nightmare of determining which books or materials fall under this broad and vague restriction. Would young adult sections need to be walled off? Would classic literature be locked away in a restricted area? Would staff be forced to act as gatekeepers, deciding who is allowed access to certain materials? **The sheer cost and impracticality of implementing such measures would devastate small and rural libraries, many of which barely have the resources to remain open as it is.**

This bill, like the similar legislation Governor Burgum wisely vetoed in 2023 (SB 2360), places undue and vague restrictions on what materials can be made available in libraries and exposes librarians and library staff to potential criminal charges. In his veto message for SB 2360, Governor Burgum correctly identified that existing laws already provide pathways for addressing concerns about library materials without the need for additional government overreach. SB 2307, like its predecessor, is unnecessary and counterproductive.

One of my greatest concerns is how this bill will disproportionately harm small and rural libraries. Many of these libraries operate with minimal staff and tight budgets. The added burden of monitoring materials under vague and subjective standards, defending themselves against potential legal challenges, and possibly facing criminal prosecution will create an environment of fear and self-censorship. Librarians should not have to worry about whether selecting a classic novel or an award-winning young adult book might subject them to legal action. These pressures could lead libraries to restrict access to materials simply to avoid controversy, depriving our communities—especially young people—of diverse and meaningful literature.

Speaking of young people, this bill could also prevent teens from working or volunteering at their local library, a formative experience that teaches responsibility, civic engagement, and a love of learning. The possibility of legal repercussions for simply shelving a book deemed inappropriate under broad and unclear guidelines could deter libraries from allowing minors to participate, stripping them of valuable educational and work opportunities.

SB 2307 is not just a burden on libraries—it is an infringement on the fundamental right to access information and ideas. Our democracy depends on the free exchange of ideas, even those that may be controversial or uncomfortable. **Allowing the government to dictate what books and materials are acceptable is a dangerous precedent that undermines intellectual freedom.**

As a parent, I believe it is my responsibility—not the government’s—to guide my child’s reading choices. Parents already have the ability to supervise their children’s library use and discuss with them what materials align with their family’s values. We do not need legislation that criminalizes librarians or places excessive burdens on our libraries to do what parents are already capable of doing themselves.

For all these reasons, I urge you to vote DO NOT PASS on SB 2307. Let us trust our librarians, respect parental rights, and uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and access to information that have long been the foundation of our public library system. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kara L. Geiger
Mandan