

My name is Cassey Slater and I am an Elementary Library Media Specialist in Grand Forks, North Dakota. I have worked both in the elementary school system and in the public library system for a total of 9 years. I am writing to you to voice my concerns about the SB 2307 bill. In my professional opinion, I am strongly urging you to deny this bill. In my opinion, his bill is government overreach, as an infringement on freedom of speech and a clear attempt at censorship on any North Dakotan's right to read.

I will start my argument by reminding you that a similar bill - bill HB 1205 - passed legislation in 2023 and has already been enacted. HB 1205 already requires public libraries to comply with policies and procedures that keep only age-appropriate materials in the children's area of the library. Public libraries are also required to file a yearly report that demonstrates compliance with this bill. Elementary school libraries already follow suit with appropriate policies and procedures. Therefore, SB 2307 is a complete overreach for something that has already been done and is working well as it is.

It is also important for me to say that librarians, both in schools and in public libraries, are trained and competent professionals that can indeed be trusted with professional procedures and collection development. Librarians deeply understand the nuance and complexity that is necessary for determining what books should be and should not be housed in a library. To pass bill SB 2307 is not only an insult to parents, it is also an insult to the professionals that keep these vital institutions running.

I would like to explain how this bill would be devastating to both public libraries and school libraries. As previously stated, public and school libraries already have (and have always had) policies and procedures for collection development that are determined by competent, trained professionals. Librarians follow procedures to make sure that materials are in the appropriate place. In order for a public library to comply with this bill, librarians would have to make a choice between the following three options:

1. Minors under the age of 17 would not be welcome in the library, as there wouldn't be a space available that wouldn't have access to "adult" materials. Rural public libraries in North Dakota tend to be in a single room and would not have the money or funds to create a barrier to separate a children's section from an adult's section. Therefore, many children across the state would lose access to the library.
2. Minors would need parental consent or presence to be in the library. This means, for example, that a 16-year-old would not be able to drive themselves and visit the library as they choose. It denies access to the library's public services, resources, and materials.
3. The library would have to remove anything deemed "sexually explicit" in order for minors to be welcome. This would require removing huge amounts of material from the adult section, including many, many novels across many different genres. This would obviously be a great loss to our culture's access to art, wisdom, and information.

Librarians would have to make one of these three choices, and any librarian would agree that none of these choices would be more beneficial than our current system. Either minors would not be welcome at all, or adults would lose access to material they should have the freedom to access. Either way, this clearly is inappropriate censorship and works to remove accessibility to public library resources, knowledge, and entertainment.

For our school libraries and classroom libraries, this will affect libraries of all age groups - elementary, middle, and high school. Similar to public libraries, school librarians are professionals and thus provide and follow policy when compiling their collections development. This bill is not only redundant in that regard, but will also be costly for the state and for the school districts.

Another point I would like to make is that the language in Bill SB 2307 is vague and ambiguous, it can easily create confusion and lead to books being removed unnecessarily. How do we define what is "obscene material/performance"? This bill states that an "average" person or "reasonable" adult would be judge of the referenced material. Who decides what "average" or "reasonable" looks like? Who is to say that any adult willing to censor a book is a "reasonable" adult? Who decides what explicit material is harmful to minors and what is valuable and educational? Obviously, librarians are trained and experienced in considering the nuances and complexities of these questions. This job belongs to professional librarians.

This bill also negates any Challenges to Materials policies and procedures that are currently in place when a member of the public has an issue with a book or material located in a public or school library. This bill clearly would allow the censorship of material as it would automatically force librarians to relocate material so that they are inaccessible to the public or students. This doesn't allow the due process of reevaluation of the material by professional librarians and/or administration. According to this bill, the removal of any item would be put into effect at the request of ANY RANDOM individual and purely based on that individual's BELIEF of whether that item contains "sexually explicit material". No one's individual belief should get to determine what another person gets to read. Not one person's voice should have the power to determine what the masses read. That is CENSORSHIP and in all honest truth, it's book banning.

With my final paragraph, I want to tell you all how much I love the library and how much I love books. I was the voracious reader that visited my hometown's public library and school library every week. I was never without a book and I was never without access to the big wide world, all because of the library, the librarians, and the books they carefully choose to share with their communities. My experience with libraries created a person that has untold depths of empathy and knowledge that is still growing to this day. I am proud that my children get the opportunity to

visit their wonderful public library and that I, as the parent, am responsible for their reading choices. Not the government and not any one individual's beliefs. I haven't even mentioned how this bill would potentially criminalize librarians like me, who are motivated only by a passion to share the love and joy of reading and the library.

Please support and protect our libraries and librarians. SB 2307 would only harm our community, culture, and children. Please vote NO on this unnecessary bill.