

February 9, 2025

Chairwoman Larson and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Renee Newton and I am testifying today in opposition to SB 2307 due to concerns about the loss of local control, the impact on taxpayer services, the overall financial burden of compliance and the implication of limiting access to educational resources.

As a mother and grandmother, I see the library as an integral place for learning and playing for my children and grandchildren. When my children were small, we lived in a community that was serviced by the Dickinson Library's bookmobile. My girls loved climbing the steps into the magical space that held so many books, books they could choose to check out and other books that were not for them at the ages they were. It was an easy thing to do, simply acknowledging that while the book looked like a good one, it was for when they were older.

As a grandmother, I've read many stories to my grandchildren. It is a joy to see them developing their own tastes when it comes to reading. Since they vary in age from 10 years to 2 months old, it's easy to say yes that book does look good, yes your sibling likes it very much, and when you're older you can read it too.

As a librarian, I know that the materials in libraries are selected based on whether they fit the criteria set forth by the library board. The location of materials in the library is based on what age group they are appropriate for. Our library has in place a reconsideration policy patrons can follow if someone is concerned about materials. The policies were developed locally, designed for our community by our library board. Section 7 of SB 2307 would remove local control by allowing any person to submit a request to the attorney general without ever speaking with the library staff, library director, library board or following the reconsideration policies we've had in place for many years.

If SB 2307 comes to pass, our library will need to create a space that is not accessible to minors by making physical changes to the building. These changes will come at a cost. While I am not an expert in construction, I understand that structural changes would involve significant costs, including updates to the fire suppression system, lighting and HVAC which could strain our library's budget. The material cost of making a restricted space as well as staff time to monitor it will require a change to the budgets already set months ago. Our library would experience financial strain which could result in a decrease in services and materials being offered. With a compliance date of January 1st 2026, the only way to build the walls is to take funds previously dedicated to purchasing materials and conducting programs and funnel them into a building project. This would come with a negative impact to taxpayers in our community who have come to expect STEAM and other after school activities for their children. Our STEAM programs are designed to foster creativity and critical thinking, redirecting funding would undermine development of these skills. Saturday Craft Club, a well attended program we offer, that saw 80 participants on February 1st would no longer be held. Readers waiting for the 2025 installment of their favorite book series would have to look elsewhere because the funds to purchase new materials will have been repurposed for an unnecessary building project.

If restricted areas cannot be created, such as on bookmobiles, libraries will be forced to decide who can come in. Right now everyone can freely come into the library or on the bookmobile. Bookmobiles could be forced to choose to service only adults or only children to comply. The challenge of deciding how to limit the access and subsequent decisions will serve to decrease participation by members of our rural communities. By limiting access to only one age group, families or individuals outside that group will be denied access to valuable resources. Being able to offer bookmobile service to rural and home-bound individuals allows them to connect to a larger community enhancing their quality of life.

Online databases and digital access to a variety of material formats including ebooks and eaudiobooks are important services offered by our library. It allows patron access to materials that do not take up physical space on our shelves in the library. Databases such as Ebsco and Gale allow for research to be conducted quickly. The information provided by databases could be for personal learning or for student research for school assignments. The impact of SB 2307 could result in libraries being unable to offer these resources to ensure compliance. This would be a negative impact to taxpayers.

Finally, SB 2307 would undermine the essential role of libraries in our state. Our library services patrons from three counties, Billings, Slope and Stark. By imposing a financial burden, limiting access to educational resources and interfering with local control, SB 2307 negatively impacts all of us. I urge you to oppose this bill.

Sincerely,  
Renee Newton