

Testimony Opposing SB 2307

I write in opposition to SB 2307 which seeks to further censor libraries in North Dakota, create more micro-managing and even penalize libraries/librarians.

As a person of the Christian faith, an ordained pastor, I share concern for the well-being and education of our children. Libraries are one safe space where children and youth can explore any variety of topics to supplement their learning and for enjoyment. The library is an essential part of any community.

Since passing HB 1205 in 2023, libraries have had to meet the Federal Miller Test as to which books are placed in the children and youth sections. Librarians are already using care and wisdom in what is readily offered to these age groups. I do not think that another library bill is necessary.

These are my concerns about this bill . . .

1. Speaking with a local librarian, I am aware that staff spent hours and a large sum of money scouring the books included in the children's and youth section of the library after the 2023 mandate. And after all that time and resources were used, they found only a couple of books that needed to be moved. Further demands on our libraries means the wasting of time and money that most libraries do not have.
2. With continued censorship of what is offered in libraries, there is more infringement on our 1st Amendment rights. Libraries are meant to meet the needs and interests of patrons. I believe there is a bias among legislators that not all people of faith share. I have great concern that what will be censored are materials that deal with racism, slavery, the treatment of Native peoples, the Holocaust and other difficult parts of our nation's history. I fear these censored books will also include those concerning minority faiths and ethnicities and, of course, those about LGBTQ topics. All these topics are beneficial and important reading. One cannot erase the bad parts of our history by banning a book. One cannot deny the identity of certain groups of people by banning more books. How much better to read and learn of these things and people so that we can make reparations and not repeat history, and so that we can embrace our diversity.
3. Who gets to choose what is appropriate and what is not? What makes the persons in the legislature the right persons to make these choices? I trust my local librarians to be the experts and the persons trained and paid to do this work. As an adult, I can make my own choices about what I choose to read and/or listen to on audiobooks – I don't need nor want the legislature making these choices for me.
4. Finally, this bill seeks to penalize libraries and/or librarians. I strongly oppose this language and these intentions. As I've stated before, libraries are public services and librarians are public servants opening a world of discovery for all ages. They do not need your control, they need to be allowed to do their jobs. Let them do that in peace and with purpose.

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