

Dear Chair Larson and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

My testimony is in opposition to Senate Bill 2307. I ask that you give this bill a “Do Not Pass” recommendation.

The library is for everybody and that means that there will be materials that are not suitable for all ages and there will be items that you personally will not like or do not think are appropriate. Developing a collection for a library that serves the public with a wide variety of viewpoints and a collection that balances the needs and wants of a community is a skill. In addition, each community, each library is different. Therefore, librarians are trained in collection development and libraries have policies that guide the selection of materials for their collection. ND libraries have a separate policy for the selection of material for children that includes the Miller test and safeguard against obscene materials. These policies are available to the public and reviewed regularly. The policies for materials for children are very strict. And each library has a policy that makes it possible for the public to challenge an item in the collection which the deem inappropriate.

I have met a lot of librarians, and they know what they are doing. I know I can trust the staff of libraries, trust that they are the experts in what a community needs and finds interesting, trust that they know how to find the book a patron wants sometimes with little or no information to go on, trust the staff to know what is best for the community, trust that they will never harm or make people uncomfortable on purpose, on the contrary I trust the staff to make everybody feel welcome and safe in the library. I trust that librarians know how to design and lay out a library that provides additional safeguards that are not obvious for patrons. But most of all I trust the expertise of librarians in collection development, programming and serving the community. They have the training and the knowledge. They are professionals. In addition, “The right to Read” is a right covered by the first amendment of free speech as libraries are a government entity.

In addition, when I moved to the United States 26 years ago the republican party stood for small, limited government, freedom for the individual right and self-determination and the right for parents to determine what is right for their children. This bill does not follow any these principles but is a prime example of government interference, government overreach and interference with parental decision making for raising their children. This bill is contrary to the all the principles republicans say they value and want to defend. For this reason alone, you all should vote “Do Not Pass” on this bill.

Taken together, I fail to see, and I question the need of this law and particularly the need to make it a criminal offense when a librarian is doing their job. This bill puts an undue burden on libraries and librarians. It will prevent parents from taking their children with them into the adult section of a library while they are selecting their own materials. It will cost money that communities do not have (especially small libraries) and will close libraries. Free access to materials is a great good and libraries fulfill that role. This bill does not solve an issue (please show me the data that shows the harm done by books) and will not protect children. Therefore, I urge you to vote “Do Not Pass”