

Milnor Public School District No. 2

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Chris Larson, Superintendent and Activities Director

Ryan Weber, High School Principal

Theresa Wittich, Elementary Principal

1 Testimony in Opposition to SB 2307

2 Presented by Dr. Chris Larson, Superintendent, Milnor Public School & President of the SMMSL Board

3

4 February 10, 2024

5

6 North Dakota Legislative Assembly

7 Chair Larson, members of the committee, my name is Dr. Chris Larson and I serve as the
8 Superintendent of Milnor Public School as well as the President of the SMMSL Board, a community
9 partnership between the City of Milnor and the Milnor Public School to operate our local library. I
10 appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today in **strong opposition to Senate Bill 2307**.

11 Frankly, I am **puzzled as to what problem this legislation is trying to fix**. As educators and librarians,
12 we take the responsibility of curating appropriate materials for students seriously. We already have
13 policies in place to **ensure books are age-appropriate and aligned with educational goals**, and we
14 work in partnership with parents to address any concerns. This bill does not solve an existing issue—it
15 **creates one** by introducing vague, broad, and **potentially unconstitutional** oversight into schools and
16 libraries.

17 Books Are Not the Problem

18 Let's be honest: **Banning books is not going to keep nude images from our youth**. The internet and
19 cell phones have a complete monopoly on that market. Any student with a smartphone has access to far
20 more explicit content than any librarian or teacher would ever place on a shelf. **Singling out books—**
21 **many of them classics with historical, literary, and educational value—does not address the real**
22 **concerns parents may have about media exposure**.

23 This bill does not **protect** students; it **limits their access to knowledge, diverse perspectives, and**
24 **historical realities**. What's more concerning is the chilling effect this law could have on schools and
25 libraries: **fearful of violating a loosely defined policy, educators may simply start removing**
26 **materials preemptively, even if they have educational merit**.

27 Criminalizing Educators and Librarians?

28 Perhaps the most alarming provision of SB 2307 is the **Class B misdemeanor** penalty. **Are we really**
29 **going to start criminally charging librarians and teachers for allowing access to literature?**

30 Let's be clear about what this means in practice:

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- 1 • A **school librarian** in a rural district could face criminal charges because a book in the school
2 library has been deemed inappropriate under this **highly subjective law**.
- 3 • A **teacher** could be **accused of a crime** for assigning a book that contains historical realities
4 about war, violence, or human relationships—topics **central to understanding history and**
5 **literature**.
- 6 • A **public librarian** could be **prosecuted** for shelving a novel that a single individual deems
7 offensive, even though it has been widely recognized for its literary and educational value.

8 This is **not about protecting children—it's about intimidation**. Educators and librarians should **not**
9 have to fear criminal charges for doing their jobs.

10 What Books Could Be Targeted Under SB 2307?

11 The vague and subjective language of this bill could result in the removal of books that have been
12 **integral to education for generations**, including:

- 13 • **"The Diary of a Young Girl" by Anne Frank** – A firsthand account of the Holocaust that
14 includes passages about puberty and self-discovery.
- 15 • **"To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee** – A classic novel that explores racial injustice and
16 contains discussions of sexual violence.
- 17 • **"Beloved" by Toni Morrison** – A Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about slavery and its lasting
18 trauma, often challenged for its difficult but historically accurate depictions.
- 19 • **"Maus" by Art Spiegelman** – A graphic novel about the Holocaust, already banned elsewhere
20 due to nudity in historical concentration camp depictions.
- 21 • **"The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian" by Sherman Alexie** – A widely
22 celebrated novel about a Native American teen, often targeted for its frank discussion of poverty,
23 racism, and personal identity.
- 24 • **"This Book is Gay" by Juno Dawson** – A nonfiction book offering guidance to LGBTQ+
25 youth, frequently challenged in states with similar laws.

26 These books **are not the problem**—they **challenge students to think critically, learn history, and**
27 **develop empathy**. Suppressing the spread of ideas **does not align with American principles**.

28 A Dangerous Precedent

29 This bill also places **unprecedented power in the hands of the Attorney General** to review and
30 restrict access to books, with schools and libraries **facing potential funding loss for noncompliance**.
31 Decisions about what is suitable for students **should be made at the local level**—by educators,
32 librarians, parents, and school boards—not by a **political or legal review process that risks ideological**
33 **bias**.

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1 **Conclusion**

2 If we truly want to help students navigate a world filled with media influences, we should **equip them**
3 **with the skills to think critically, not restrict their access to knowledge.** SB 2307 is **unnecessary,**
4 **harmful, and fundamentally un-American in its attempt to control what ideas can and cannot be**
5 **read.**

6 Worse yet, **criminalizing educators and librarians is an attack on the very people who dedicate**
7 **their lives to fostering knowledge and literacy.**

8 I urge you to **reject this bill** and stand for the principles of free inquiry, local control, and educational
9 integrity.

10 Thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions.

11 Respectfully submitted,

12
13 Dr. Chris Larson
14 Superintendent
15 Milnor Public School
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