

Madam Chairman Larson and the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Sara Planteen, I am the mother of 3 children who were up until recently enrolled in one of North Dakota's public schools, and I am here today to testify in support of SB2307. I am here to ask you to protect my children and all the children in ND and their innocence. We live in a world where it is more important to belong, then it is to do what is right for our children. We have a society that is trying to desensitize our children to sex. I'm not going to lie, talking about this subject matter up here today and in the months past has been very uncomfortable for me, never something I thought I would have to do.

In August my children came home from Sargent Central Public School in Forman and told me the school had a poster displaying a new book series. This new book series is written below a middle school reading level and is a cartoon book that is said to be for grades 9-12. The summaries on booklooks.org state it contains self harm, gender ideologies, explicit sexual activities, alcohol use by minors, profanity, derogatory terms and alternate sexualities. It was on the front display when you came into the library and accessible for all grades PreK-12. After verifying the books were indeed on the front display and accessible to all students prek-12 we asked the librarian to move the books to a more age appropriate area, but were told no. A conversation with the principal and superintendent got me nowhere. The librarian was also showing the children as young as 9 videos of new books that explore gender roles, sexuality and race making some students feel uncomfortable and upsetting to parents. Getting nowhere with administration I took the next step. School board policy states a request for reconsideration should be filed. I filed that on October 11th. My request for review was passed around the school for staff to read. Some staff then sent a statement to the school board members stating there was nothing wrong with the books in question. Finally on October 30th, 13 business days later, after everyone else was done reading it, brought the complaint to the school board so they could appoint a committee. School board policy states, the board **shall** appoint a curriculum review committee annually **before** the commencement of the school year, that being in July. When I looked at the annual meeting minutes 2 school board members were selected for this committee. BUT that didn't fit the agenda, so the superintendent hand-picked committee members that included teachers and staff that had already signed a statement saying there was nothing wrong with the books. Do you think my request was given a fair and unbiased review if people reviewing it already wrote a statement saying there was nothing wrong with the books?

So I started a petition, requesting the school board remove the books, and update school board policies so that visually pornographic material could not be in the school. This current policy hasn't been updated in over 10 years. We already have policies in place that won't allow students to draw, write or have conversations like the contents of the books, so why is the school allowed to have books in the school library going against school board policy? I spent days driving around our school district and talking to patrons. The community was shocked, upset and disappointed. I can't tell you the number of people that commented that common sense is gone. I had multiple people start to cry when I showed them the books, some looked and instantly had to close the book because they just couldn't handle what I had shown them. They agreed showing pictures of cartoon characters having oral and anal sex was not something they wanted their tax dollars spent on.

But employees of the school started their own petition and “movement”. Cancel anyone that signed that petition, attacking business owners, parents, children, because their parents signed and community members. They went so far as to tell students false information about the petition causing students to turn on their parents, encouraging disrespect and rebellion. They told people the book I was showing patrons wasn’t even a book at the school and I was lying. They said they have no record of any children under 9th grade checking out the book. The school already has a policy they don’t need to update the current policy.

On November 13th I had 228 signatures when I presented it to the school board. Just a few years ago only 29 people showed up to vote for the school board, 228 signatures is substantial. The staff rallied up students to attend to hold up signs, some students going against parents consent. One school board member stated everyone in the building said it should be here. Do parents, community members and tax payers not get a say anymore only teachers, staff and administration? An elementary teacher stated on behalf of the teachers and staff they only saw illustrations of kissing, cuddling, hand holding and people in bed together but nothing showing graphic or erotic behavior and if an elementary student finds the book they are violating school board policy. There was no need for the kids to find the books, they were put right in front of them. Multiple parents with students as young as 8 years old came forward and said their child had checked out the books or looked at them in the library. Why would the school even have books that would violate school board policy if a student found it? Ultimately that night the Sargent Central Public School board did nothing with my review for reconsideration or the petition, I feel board members feared retaliation from staff and administration. Clearly community input is not valued when it does not match the administration's opinion.

I know people are going to say we need to leave local control, but I am telling you from my experience local control on this matter isn’t working. If you speak up, simply trying to protect children you are attacked by people you thought were your friends, because again it’s more important to belong. Doing what is right won’t make you popular and you won’t be able to rub elbows at the next basketball game. In small communities it is more important to belong, then it is to do what is right for our children.

I urge you to take action to protect the innocence and well-being of our children. No child should have access to pornographic or sexually explicit materials in their school library. Parents trust public schools to provide a safe and appropriate learning environment. One that prioritizes education, not exposure to inappropriate content. Our kids deserve better.

I urge a DO PASS on Senate Bill 2307 . Thank you. I stand for questions.