

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

My name is Neil Planteen of Cogswell in Sargent County, District 26. I am a member of the Sargent Central School Board in Forman, and have served for nine years, three of those years as Board President. The views expressed here are solely my own and do not necessarily represent the Sargent Central School Board. I am here to testify as an individual in support of Senate Bill 2307.

This bill has been referred to as a censorship bill by those who oppose it, but I want to respectfully ask these three questions. If a student were to “Google” or online search for images of “teen sex” on a publically owned device do you think it would return any results? Absolutely not. The state’s firewall applied to ALL public school computers and the school’s own servers would block any content being displayed from the eyes of underage children. If a school age student were to draw a picture of teens talking about sex in provocative positions, do you think they would be reported to the administration? If students were talking in a manner describing sexual encounters, would that be acceptable table talk in our public school systems? The answer to all these questions is a pretty simple NO. So, I will ask you, if a student can’t search it online with a school owned device, if they can’t draw the pictures themselves, and if they can’t speak about it, then why in the world was it acceptable to bring these items into our public schools for students to view, under the guise of “graphic novels” or other library content? I believe that lack of oversight has allowed the use of the public school library’s freedom to become a loophole allowing inappropriate content to be introduced to our students and does not align with the values and protections that we already enforce in other areas.

This isn't censorship in the sense that banning books like *Catcher In The Rye* was. I'll say again, THIS BILL IS NOT CENSORSHIP, it is common sense. Senate Bill 2307 does not aim to censor literature or limit academic freedom. It ensures that ALL materials provided in publicly funded schools adhere to the same standards that we already apply in other areas. Just as we do not allow students to access explicit content online or discuss these things in inappropriate settings, we should ensure that school libraries also maintain these same standards.

Graphic novels are nothing new, I bet there are some of you that remember them when they were called comic books. They are nothing new, they are comic books from front to back with a dressed up name to allow them into the same literary confinements as the likes of Ernest Hemmingway and Louis L'aMour.

I'm sure our own Louis L'aMour would be rolling in his grave to see sexualized comic books displacing his novels. Offering these teen based graphic novels is said to offer students, who struggle to read, a better option and stories to understand. While I can sympathize and agree with that to a point, I absolutely do not agree that it is a good idea for students and especially struggling students to read sexually charged phrases of improper grammar and view provocative pictures that any reasonable adult would perceive as sex. These books have only infiltrated our schools over the past few years and won't be hard to root out.

You may hear opponents of this bill say it's a good idea to expose students to a variety of ideals and lifestyles, but you know what else was a good idea when it first came around? ASBESTOS. Obscene, sexualized and pornographic content in a school is literary asbestos and just as we recognize the dangers of asbestos, we must recognize the harm of exposing children to sexually explicit materials and act accordingly.

We protect our kids against drugs, alcohol, violence, you name it and unfortunately these things still creep into our lives. If we throw up our hands and drop the guardrails against sex in our institutions, just what exactly do you expect will happen? And it will happen at a much younger age than you think.

In Matthew 18:6 Jesus says, "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."

We need to protect the innocence of our children. We bear this responsibility. This is North Dakota for pete's sake. We wave to strangers we meet on the road, we teach our kids to hold the doors for seniors at church, if a neighbor needs help, we help them. We know what's right and what's wrong. You aren't writing laws for Minnesota, California or New York. You are here to serve North Dakotans and if a poll went out asking what the people of North Dakota thought about providing unsolicited sex books and pornographic materials to students under the age of eighteen without the consent of their parents or even their parents knowledge for that matter. What do you think the response would be? Would it be pitchforks and torches over banning books, or a simple common sense "NO". The people of North Dakota have always valued protecting children and I believe the overwhelming majority would agree that explicit materials do not belong in our public schools. This isn't about censorship or banning books. It's about protecting the children using our public institutions.

I would even argue that it is our humanitarian duty to protect our youth, while we cannot control what they do at home or outside of the settings owned by the public, it is indeed right and our duty to protect them wherever and whenever allowed by century code.

I urge this committee a DO PASS recommendation for Senate Bill 2307.

Thank you, I stand for questions.