

1/17/2023

To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Dr. Jacob Erickson, and I'm a constituent in rural Minot, North Dakota. I'm writing today to urge you to oppose House Bill 1205.

I write as a teacher and professor of Christian Theology and Ethics, who spends his professional time engaging undergraduate and graduate students on the thorny questions of morality, ethics, and the public good. I've been studying, teaching, and facilitating conversations on these aspects of public life for 20 years.

As a person of faith and as a professional ethicist, I find these Bills incredibly poorly worded, unclear, and harmful in their effect. These Bills, if made into law, would throw many--business owners, librarians, and those who read--into disarray on how to proceed. Indeed, it could be argued that many classic novels would not pass scrutiny in the ways the current bills are written.

But more: as a Christian and citizen, I find the whole intent of legislating morality in this way incredibly offensive to the ways I believe citizens are to embody their understanding of morality and faith in the public square. Bills such as these are detrimental to the ways we speak about morality and the common good in America. They contribute to animosity and bad faith, and usually have negative and unintended effects. Make no mistake, this Bill, if implemented, will have negative and unintended effects.

These Bills contribute to numerous harms to hard-working North Dakotans. I find these proposed Bills discriminatory towards women and LGBTQ+ people, for specifically targeting sexual identity and gender identity. As others have noted, Bills such as these criminalize librarians (both in demonizing public servants and in real legal impacts). These Bills infringe on the freedom and right to read as free speech. Bills such as these create expensive bureaucratic oversight and massive governmental overreach into the work of libraries and booksellers.

Proposed Bills like HB1205 and SB2123 serve as an incredible insult to hard-working librarians, public educators, and teachers--professionals who are *trained* to think through the ethical sensitivity of material in a morally ambiguous world, professionals who are trained to have and to facilitate serious conversations about the ethics of reading.

As an educator and citizen, I am incredibly disappointed to see these Bills proposed, and my deepest hope is that they would be defeated. Please oppose them.

My best wishes for your work, and thanks for your service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jacob J. Erickson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Jacob J. Erickson

Dr. Jacob J. Erickson (PhD, M.Div, BA)
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