

Chairman Klemin and Representative members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Anita Tulp and I am the Director of the Valley City Barnes County Public Library. As a librarian I am definitely concerned about how SB 2360 will affect not only our library, but the school and public libraries across our state. However, today I would like to speak from mostly a personal point of view as a voice that I believe you have not heard yet. I speak today as the voice of a survivor. A survivor of both child abuse and sexual abuse. This is a story not easily told so I will keep it as short as possible.

I came to know my father as what I call an equal opportunity abuser. My mother, siblings, and I were all victims of his abuse. It didn't matter if he was drunk, angry, or even happy, he would always find a way to justify his actions. Anything could set him off. If he didn't think we worked hard enough, or were too noisy, or were too quiet, or even too happy, are just a few examples of the reasons he used to abuse us verbally, mentally, and physically. I will not go into the sordid details of those years, yet I will say that they were full of pain, bruises, blood, and mostly fear. Instead, I will focus on my journey of survival.

That journey began in the public library. There I found *The Little House on the Prairie* books and the Nancy Drew mysteries. They provided me times of escape from my real world into a world where families were happy and adventurous, and where fathers were loving and supportive. As I grew older, I found books on romance and I dreamed that someday someone would come to rescue me and show me a life very different from the one I knew. Of course, those were only dreams. I didn't know that those types of "normal" lives even existed.

At the end of my junior year in high school, my father moved us to North Dakota. I continued to read and ventured into books of a more realistic and true story nature such as *"Alive"* and *"The Other Side of the Mountain."* After graduating from high school and moving on to college, I found friends that supported me who kept telling me that my life could be different. What I experienced as a child was not a normal childhood. I tried to believe that yet with the threats of violence and the psychological chains that lasted well into my marriage. I still feared my father. Even though my husband was loving and supportive, I couldn't get past the feeling of waiting for the other shoe to drop so to speak.

The library continued to be a part of my journey of healing. I was now an adult and finally found books I really connected with like *"A Child Called It," "Go Ask Alice,"* and *"A Million Little Pieces"* that were stories of abuse and the struggle to survive and heal. I didn't feel alone anymore. Those books and others I found made it easier to talk about, dispelled some of the fear, and helped me build more confidence in myself. My journey continued as I went back to college, earned a teaching degree and became a school librarian.

I know that you have heard a lot of scientific facts about the effects that pornographic and obscene material can have on a child that is not ready to see it. The trauma and

possible addiction that a child can experience is horrible. I cannot dispute those facts because I have lived through it. However, from all the testimony I listened to and read, I did not hear any confirmed facts from any of the experts saying that this is happening in the library. I know that was not my experience and I know that my abusers did not get their ideas from any materials in a library.

From my own experience, I know that healing does take place from materials found in a public library. I know that I could not afford to buy a lot of the books I read nor could I afford counseling, so the library became an important resource for my own journey to healing. I firmly believe that if the library had some of these books when I was a child, I might have realized much sooner that my life was not normal, that I could do something to stop the abuse, and that I might have started my journey to healing much sooner. It saddens me to know that children and teens are still experiencing child abuse, sexual abuse, and quite often neglect in a world that should cherish our children. I pray that they can break their silence and break the cycle. If the library can help them do that, it needs to have the information in it to do so.

I will always defend the library and the rights of people to read and view the materials they wish to find. Our first amendment rights guarantee us freedom of speech whether it is verbal, written, or pictorial. This bill may lead to the silencing of many authors that choose to tell their stories through words or drawings. It will discriminate against those that want to and perhaps need to read or view them.

Our library, as well as most if not all others, already has a collection development policy in place to ensure that items purchased meet the criteria and placement requirements appropriate for each section of our library. We also have a policy for reconsideration which includes information about the reconsideration procedure that allows any person to challenge a material they feel is not appropriate in some way. These policies work and allow the community to be a part of the process where their voices can be heard. Since we as librarians also live and work in the community, we focus on having materials available that reflects the diversity of our population. It would make no sense to spend money on materials that would just sit on a shelf. We can easily find materials we do not own in our library through online resources or through Interlibrary Loan.

We know that these policies work as our library was one that recently went through the process with the challenge of the book "Let's Talk About It" by Erika Moen and Matthew Nolan which seems to have been one of the primary reasons for this legislation. The challenge led to a public hearing where both opposition to the book as well as supporters of the book had an opportunity to speak publicly or provide written testimony to our Library Board. The Library Board took all the provided testimony under consideration in making the final decision about the book. The decision was made to move the book from the Young Adult section of the library to the Adult section. This issue was solved locally through our own governing policies. I strongly believe that this type of governing should stay at the local level. I fear that if this bill passes, our community will no longer have a say in what they want to read and view in the library.

Our online resources and computer services are important services that we offer to our community. I fear that if this bill would pass, we would lose our online databases due to either the provider refusing to filter the resources they carry for us or the exorbitant cost that would be passed on to us for them doing so. We already have filtering systems in place which keeps both our computer users and WiFi users from accessing any inappropriate material.

My greatest fear is that if this bill passes, I might have to tell a patron that we no longer can carry the kind of reading material they wish to have. We have many people in our community that depend on the library for their research and entertainment needs. So far this year, our library has saved our patrons \$90,000 by providing them with materials they want free of charge. This money is then spent throughout our community supporting businesses and organizations. The public library becomes an important resource for everyone in our community!

In conclusion, I thank God for the libraries I encountered throughout my journey and the many voices within them that spoke to me in ways that I needed to hear. I also thank God for my husband who for the last 45 years has been my protector and biggest supporter through the many years of fear and struggle to heal. I know that without either, I would not be the wife, mother, grandmother, and the educated professional I am today.

Please vote "Do Not Pass" on SB 2360.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Anita Tulp, VCBC Public Library Director