

Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to read testimony about bills laid before you this session. I hope you are taking to heart the vast amount of comments and evidence surrounding the impact so many of the proposed bills will have on the citizens of our state. In North Dakota we have always prided ourselves as friendly and welcoming. Unfortunately, many bills this session run contrary to these thoughts.

I feel it is my duty as a citizen of this state to voice my strong objection to SB 2360. I have spoken to and heard from many North Dakotans on both sides of the political spectrum who agree this bill is at best a waste of time, and at worst is critically destructive. I understand it is your wish to protect the children of North Dakota, and I applaud that wish. However, this bill does not protect anybody. Instead, what these bills do is give unprecedented power to individuals to control what others have access to. For centuries public libraries have been troves of information, resources, and yes, entertainment, and they continue to be just that. They are not dens of pornography, and to those who claim otherwise I say shame on you. What I have access to at my library should be limited only to what I wish to access, and to what trained librarians have determined should be on the shelves. What others wish to have access to is up to them; I have no intention on imposing my beliefs on what they read. For example, I have absolutely no desire to read "50 Shades of Grey," but I also have no right to prevent another from checking that book out at the library, or purchasing it at a bookstore. I have two teenaged children who have grown up in public libraries. What they have access to should be limited only to what they wish to access as influenced by the way my wife and I have chosen to raise them. We participate in the lives of our children. We are responsible for teaching them values. And we have the right to decide what is or is not appropriate. To claim the legislature has a duty to make these decisions for every library patron, every family, is the very height of hubris.

Furthermore, this bill takes government overreach to another level by including private business and any institution that has its doors open to the public and contains virtually any type of printed material. This level of government intrusion is truly disheartening. Nearly every growing city in our state is involved in actively seeking new businesses. What does it tell these businesses when our state government is willing to go to extreme measures to exert their power and opinion over business owners in our state?

In his testimony in favor of HB 1205, a bill with similar aims, Representative Lefor paints a pastoral image of an American family with 3 TV channels and dinners around the table. He goes on to "fast forward many years later" to discuss statistics about stress and mental illness as though these things did not exist in his idyllic childhood. I may be a little bit younger than Representative Lefor, but I too remember having only 3 channels and family dinners around a table. While my teenaged children can't fathom a world with such limited viewing choices on their TV, I am happy to say they will remember family dinners around a table and the discussions that took place. I fully understand the added pressures and stresses that exists in today's world, but Representative Lefor misses the mark in many areas. First of all, the time period he is referencing was not as ideal as he would like it to sound. Stress, peer pressure, and yes, sex, existed even then. At that time however, there weren't tests to measure stress like there are now, and mental illness was something that wasn't talked about. As kids, my generation and older weren't asked about stress, but I assure you it was there. The materials alluded to in SB 2360 and HB 1205 are not causing stress or mental illness. Likewise they are not promoting sex, protected or unprotected. And unprotected sex is another piece that certainly existed in this picture perfect

childhood presented. I personally know a woman, currently in her 70s, who became pregnant as a teenager. The solution? Send her to stay at her “aunt’s house” for a few months. Where she really went was to a kind of boarding house for pregnant teens where the young women and girls were taught how to be good homemakers for their future husbands. They were also taught to ignore and forget their present situation, and when the baby came it was quickly whisked away, any glance from the mother prevented. And yes, this took place in North Dakota. The good ol’ days, as it were, had a lot of hidden dark corners that get forgotten when nostalgically looking back across time. Today, even though there are so many negative elements pushing and pulling us, we know more, and understand more. Because we take an active role in our children’s lives, my wife and I have no worry about what they may come across in a library, bookstore, museum, art gallery, or anyplace else that this bill targets. And if we ever have a question about them going somewhere, we check it out for ourselves first. The removal of individual freedom, and taking that power away from parents, is reckless, and SB 2360 will have a detrimental impact on our state.

Individual freedoms have been high on the priority list for many of you. We have seen this in action during the pandemic especially. You fought for a parent’s right to choose whether or not their children should mask and whether or not to vaccinate their children. These bills do not protect our children. Instead they harm our children by showing them how easy it is for government to step in and tell them and their parents what is right. Continue your fight for individual freedom and protection of our children by allowing us, the people and parents of North Dakota, to make those decisions on our own. I urge you to move a Do Not Pass on SB 2360, and to vote No when it reaches the House floor. Thank you.