

I am writing as a member of the Board of Trustees for Minot Public Library, a library volunteer as well as patron, and a mom to oppose SB 2123. It is clear that the second and third order effects of criminalizing libraries for offering “any photograph, book, paperback book, pamphlet, or magazine, the exposed cover of which exploits, is devoted to, or contains depictions or written descriptions of nude or partially denuded figures posed or presented in a manner to exploit sex, lust, or perversion,” have not been considered. Libraries are an inclusive space. They serve the entire community regardless of age, race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religion, creed, disability, economic status, or any other personal identifier. They provide access to educational information as well as entertainment. Reading is a joy. It is an escape from the stressors of reality. It is a way to educate oneself. It is a way to find representations of oneself and one’s life experiences that lets us know we are not alone. We are able to gain empathy through someone else’s story. We are able to learn how to process our own emotions through another lens even through works of fiction. It is not something to take for granted. Owning books is a luxury that some cannot afford, but everyone deserves access to reading materials to find whatever it is they need in that moment. Purchasing novels is not a necessity when you’re struggling to pay bills, but the escape, the education, the representation of the human experience, that is a necessity. Libraries remove those economic barriers to allow anyone to find that joy for themselves. Sex is a normal human experience and as such has been depicted in art and literature for thousands of years. Forcing the removal of depictions and descriptions of this would create inequities across socioeconomic lines. There is a reason that libraries are separated into children’s, young adult, and adult sections, however that does not mean that minors are restricted to one area. A middle schooler may stumble upon a harlequin novel with an objectively risqué cover. If SB 2123 were to pass, the library or a librarian, a public servant, would be held criminally responsible. The reality is that this hypothetical situation might lead to an uncomfortable conversation, but it is not one that would have any kind of lasting negative effects on the child. Removing that same novel, so that there was no chance for a child to see it, would deny an elderly woman whose library books are delivered to an assistant living facility from being able to indulge in her favorite genre which plays a role in maintaining her mental health. We cannot be so uncomfortable with the idea of a minor seeing part of the human body that we promote censorship. We cannot be so uncomfortable with nudity that we send a message that bodies are shameful. We cannot be so uncomfortable with sex that we hinder the important role that libraries have in our communities. It is not for elected officials to impose their personal morals on all of their constituents. It is not the place of the government to decide what is and is not appropriate for my child to read. Guardians need to be involved enough in the lives of the minors in their care that they determine what they are allowed to read based on the child’s maturity level. Criminalizing depictions of sex is not the way we protect our children. We protect our children through education, empathy, and understanding.

I will also point out that passing this bill would negatively affect small businesses. Bookstores provide materials for all ages, but it is not part of the employees’ jobs to restrict minors to certain areas. This means that those who can afford to will turn to online sources to purchase popular books instead of shopping local hurting our economy and the livelihoods of some North Dakota business owners.

At no time in history have the people who have banned books been the good guys.