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January 22nd, 2023
Senator Diane Larson, Chair
Senate House Judiciary Committee

Dear Committee Chair and Members of the ND Senate House Judiciary Committee:
My name is Melissa Lloyd. I am the Assistant Director at the Valley City Barnes County Public Library. I am writing to you to express my opposition to SB 2123. I am concerned that this bill would make it impossible for public libraries and other educational entities function, as well as be detrimental to many retail establishments.

The very pillar of a Public Library's foundation is equitable access of information to everyone regardless of race, religion, sexual identity, or socioeconomic status. As a Public Librarian I respect and support a person's freedom to choose what they read. When a government begins to restrict access and/or ban books you start to question the democracy of that government and the freedoms guaranteed by the United States Constitution. I ask you to consider these points:

1. The romance genre is a billion-dollar industry and contains many "written descriptions of nude or partially denuded human figures presented in a manner to exploit sex" that might be considered objectionable to many. For example, A gentleman came in the library to complain about the "filth" he read in an inspirational romance, the two main characters, had "kissed and held each other in a tender embrace". The gentleman thought this was too explicit. According to the bill, the library would have to remove the book. If it did not the librarian would be charged with a misdemeanor.
2. This bill would create fear for librarians. It is wrong to persecute people who have done nothing wrong. It is a librarian's job to provide access to information. Librarians don't force anyone to read books with "sexually explicit" material. If someone were to request a book deemed "sexually explicit", the librarian would have to deny the request for fear of persecution. Hindering the rights of the individual to access information.
3. It also sets up restrictions to access to Graphic Novels. Graphic Novels have been a valuable tool to people with reading disabilities to achieve greater understanding of literature. This bill would eliminate access for these individuals. Examples of Graphic Novel literature which feature images described in the bill include: The Holy Bible, Shakespeare's Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet and Homer's The Odyssey.

4. The purpose of this bill would be to punish people whose tax dollars are used so they don't have to purchase these materials from accessing information, and persecute the libraries and librarians who provide access to the information. This bill is so broad that not only will it be detrimental to libraries, but it would also hurt other educational institutions as well as retail stores. A museum or art gallery would not be able to display anything relating to Greek or Roman History or Art. Pictures of the Sistine Chapel would not be able to be shown. Magazines like Sports Illustrated, Men's Health, and Rolling Stone would not be allowed at retail stores because they feature partially nude males and females on the cover.

I understand the purpose of the bill is to protect children from seeing pornographic images, but kids have access to the internet. If they wish to find these things, they will. This bill will only take away people's first amendment right to read what they wish and explore the world of art and literature. Whether you support the book or not, whether you agree with it or not. Libraries don't ban books, because governments who do are never painted as heroes.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my story.

Sincerely,

Melissa Lloyd

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