

Kayla Schmidt – District 35  
Opposition - SB 2123  
North Dakota Senate Judiciary Committee

January 23, 2023

Chair Larson and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Kayla Schmidt and I live in Bismarck. I've lived in North Dakota my entire life, except for one year in which I left to study in England to earn my M.A. in Creative Nonfiction and Biography writing.

I worried about how my work would compare to my peers—a cohort made up of writers from across the world. However, I found I had a unique perspective that I could bring to my memoir and personal essays. The Midwest lived-experience is not widely written about—perhaps because so many of our artists do not feel supported. Our stories don't feel significant. We self-censor.

SB2123 is a much more dangerous kind of censorship. So much of my returning to North Dakota depended on the notion that I could still write with honesty about my life and my home. That I could still access creative works, collaborate with the few working artists in the state, perform and publish my writing freely.

North Dakota already suffers from losing the majority of its creative people to larger, more welcoming cities. Most local writers I admire do not live in North Dakota any longer.

In contrast, Norwich, the city where I earned my degree, nurtures creativity. They have been designated as a UNESCO 'City of Literature,' with modern support for artists through their university programs and writing centers and their recognition of past writers of importance: Julian of Norwich published the first book in English written by a woman in 1395. Through famine, war, changes in leadership, changes in personal taste, they have uplifted the arts for centuries.

Leaving that environment to return home to North Dakota was difficult. I'd become accustomed to living in a community that hosted festivals, open mics, pop up galleries, readings, concerts, parades, performances, and celebrated creative expression of all kinds.

SB2123 would significantly damage any possibility of freedom of expression in our state. If schools, colleges, universities, museums, public libraries, art galleries, and businesses cannot allow creative works for fear that they fall outside a limited definition of acceptable content, we have no culture. We lose our talented artists. We lose revenue. We lose freedom of expression.

Please give SB2123 a "Do Not Pass" recommendation. Let North Dakota remain a place where creativity, not censorship, thrives.

Sincerely,

Kayla Schmidt



"All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well." – Julian of Norwich