

Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My testimony comes to you as a citizen of Grand Forks, ND and parent of two elementary aged children. I am requesting a DO NOT PASS on SB 2307.

In a world where cost of living will only increase, it is imperative that we do not remove those things that educate, entertain, and create community without creating a financial burden. A public library is one of the few places a person can exist for free, especially in a bitter ND winter which prevents spending too much time outside with young children. This bill would increase costs for public libraries by needing the infrastructure to support this locked space and likely decrease patronage, and in turn impact the financial free-ness of these spaces for community members. All members of my family have found a hobby we love, an unending source of learning, and developed friendships based on similar interests through books we access at our school and public libraries.

My children love the public library and we visit as often as we are able. Throughout all of these visits, I have not once been concerned about my children consuming obscene content, because I as their parent am responsible for controlling their sources of entertainment. This means that they are supervised in public spaces, the books they choose to read are shown to and approved by me, and they are not given free reign to make their own decisions about content they consume as a child. In addition to supervision, my children are taught that not all things are for them. They know they have to discuss reading choices with their parents because some books are written for an audience of children their age, some for adults, and some are somewhere in between. They have been taught that books for an adult audience have topics that they are not mature enough to understand. This does not just mean the "obscene language" referenced in this bill but things like abuse, different experiences of death, and historical topics surrounding politics and war that they do not yet have the maturity for. Rather than hiding books containing what has been referred to as obscene content, which will inevitably make it something children more actively seek out, children must be taught appropriate ranges of content and offered sources that reflect their level of maturity. I used this word repeatedly because I want to stress that a readiness to consume this content is based on a person's maturity, which happens at different ages for every person, and should not be assigned a blanket age.

In addition, I want to discuss the section on digital resources, which would effectively remove access for all to resources like Libby and Hoopla. For those who are unfamiliar, these are websites and applications that can be linked to your public library for free access to digital books. For myself and my family of readers, this has been an important resource when we have been unable to go to the library, such as when my vehicle was out of commission or when my child was in a non-local hospital. As it is impossible to truly verify an identity over a digital resource, maintaining these resources would likely become an unfeasible task for school and public libraries causing the elimination of the services. While I hope this would be an unintended consequence stemming from the ignorance of those proposing this bill, I do not doubt that it is another attempt at censorship.

Finally, the expression of the bill relating to books of “serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value” is subjective at best. No matter the content, all books are educational in the way of teaching language, comprehension, grammatical structure and more. This is what a “reasonable adult,” as referenced in the bill, should be able to identify and acknowledge.

I'll leave you with encouragement to read more. You may find a new hobby to help bring more joy to your life while learning that historically, those who have censored and banned literature do not find themselves on the right side of history, respect, or power.

Sincerely,
Alexis