

Chairman Lawrence Klemin
House Judiciary Committee
Regarding HB 1205
January 17, 2023

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Corinne Edgerton and I am a library technician and concerned North Dakota library patron. I am testifying today against the proposed bill relating to prohibiting public libraries from maintaining sexually explicit books.

Public libraries are charged with the mission of providing services and resources to meet the diverse interests and informational needs of the communities they serve. They have written policy that guides the selection, deselection, and reconsideration of library resources. Developing a collection is a process that is worked on every day by the collection librarian. They evaluate a plethora of titles looking to ensure their accuracy, timeliness, and value. This also establishes a process by which individuals can share their concerns about library resources in a discussion with a librarian or, if their concerns are unresolved, invoke a formal reconsideration process. Thus, libraries should not limit the selection and development of library resources simply because minors will have access to them.

Although this bill is motivated by a desire to protect children from “sexual explicit” content, Access to Library Resources and Services for Minors, an interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights (American Library Association’s basic policy concerning access to information) states that, “Librarians and governing bodies should maintain that parents—and only parents—have the right and the responsibility to restrict the access of their children—**and only their children**—to library resources.” Censorship by librarians of constitutionally protected speech, whether for protection or for any other reason, violates the First Amendment.

On a more personal note, as someone on the asexual and aromantic spectrums, there were not many stories for me to understand myself growing up. But today, diverse books create a better lens through which all children and teens can see themselves in library collections. However, this bill targets LGBTQ+ youth and I do not want them to feel like they are less than.

In conclusion, books are powerful. Books can save lives. Books teach empathy. Sharing stories important to us means sharing a part of ourselves. Books reach across boundaries and build connections between readers. Censorship, on the other hand, creates barriers. As Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan, Jr. said in *Texas v. Johnson*, “If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable.” Therefore, I urge you

to give a “do not pass” recommendation for this bill. I thank you for your time and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Corinne Edgerton

Corinne Edgerton (she, her)