

## **Testimony by Kara Geiger in OPPOSITION to HB 1205**

(Though I am a current member of the Board of Trustees for the Morton Mandan Public Library, this is my personal testimony and is not necessarily the position of the MMPL, its trustees, or its staff. My comments are mine alone.)

This bill changed a bit after I submitted my original opposition testimony to the House Judiciary Committee in January. After reviewing the version that passed the House, I am still opposed to HB 1205 for the following reasons:

- This bill tasks each public library in the state with reviewing its entire collection of materials, which places an undue burden on institutions that already do not receive enough funding to fully staff them or to provide all the programs and services that public libraries are expected to provide. This bill will especially hurt rural libraries, many of which have only one paid staff member. I fear that we will see a mass closing of public libraries in the communities that need them the most.
- I can't speak to every library in the state, but I do know that the ones in our largest communities already have policies and procedures in place for members of the public to challenge any material in a library's collection. Why is this not good enough? Why this attempt by the government to censor libraries?
- This bill, if passed, would set a very dangerous precedent. What category might be censored next? How about books that challenge Christianity or promote atheism? Considering the demographics of the current legislature, it seems entirely possible that something like that could be next, if this bill passes. Or perhaps next session our mostly male legislature decides that feminism and vaginas are far too dangerous or disgusting, so books that mention either of those end up on the chopping block. Where does it stop? It needs to stop here and now, by killing this bill.

Public libraries exist for the good of society. They are governed by volunteer trustees who help write the policies by which a library operates and ensures that those policies are followed. They are staff by professional librarians. Books and other materials are not added to a library's collection randomly or on a whim. A great deal of thought and research goes into it, along with public input. Any member of the public can challenge a book.

A bill like HB 1205 tells me that our government does not trust public libraries, their staff, or their trustees. If that is true – if you truly believe that public libraries in North Dakota are not operating with the best interests of our citizens in mind – then we have a much bigger problem than the scope of what this bill addresses. If I'm mistaken – if you DO trust libraries – then I respectfully ask you to back off and let libraries do their job. Encourage your constituents to work with their local library to address their concerns about materials they feel shouldn't be in the library. Encourage them to attend library board meetings, which are always open to the public, to ask questions, and to engage in productive dialogue.

The government should not have a say in what a public library should or should not have in its collection. That's censorship and it's illegal. **Vote NO on HB 1205.**

As I said in my original testimony, history tells us that those who try to ban books are NEVER on the right side of history. Be on the right side and vote NO on this bill.

Thank you for your time.

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