

February 12, 2024

Dear Education Committee Members,

My name is Tammie Benham and I am a Kansas librarian. I work as the Youth Services Consultant for Southeast Kansas Library System and serve as co-chair of the Intellectual Freedom Committee for Kansas Library Association. However, today I'm providing this personal testimony in opposition of HB 2700.

What has been proposed in HB2700 would be detrimental to children and families in Kansas. I began my professional life in the public school classroom, taking children to the school library when certified school librarians were considered essential. I have watched as the field has been decimated by budget restrictions and failure to replace essential staff when retirements occur. This has led to the present moment.

HB2700 attempts to take one duty of a professional librarian and hand it to a group of well-meaning but un-licensed individuals. Professional librarians are highly trained individuals with specialized knowledge. What is being attempted here would be akin to proposing the same group be allowed to make decisions on renovating a house, prescribing a medication, playing a concert, serving a banquet, or filling a cavity, with no prior experience.

As a parent and grandparent, I'm not any more interested in any other adult making decisions regarding the materials my family is exposed to than you are in letting me make the decisions for YOU. Every family has the right to make these decisions. And frankly, children know what they like, dislike, are interested in, or not interested in, and are not too shy to voice their opinions. The free and open discourse of ideas is bedrock in education.

Deciding what an individual is allowed to read is NOT the responsibility of government. This is the sole responsibility of families, whereas purchasing for school libraries is the responsibility of licensed professionals. The government is not a parent and imposing any mandatory rating system is a political judgement.

Parents and students could sue if this legislation is passed and used as a means to restrict access to information as this impinges on intellectual freedom. This proposed legislation is quite simply intended to place a barrier between the reader and the book. I urge you to understand the gravity in deciding how you will vote on this legislation.

The content rating system proposed in this legislation does not exist. By their very nature, rating systems are subjective value statements placed on items by arbitrary individuals. Here, only one person on the proposed committee is required to be a librarian; a trained, licensed individual. In essence, you are proposing taking one piece of the varied skillset of a professionally trained and licensed librarian and usurping the rights and responsibilities of parents by randomly deciding if their child should have access.

On a personal note, I have a child who lives with dyslexia. My child learned to read because of the Harry Potter series of books. They couldn't wait to read what came next! One day after school I was met by my fifth grader who was furious! They had been told the material in the fifth book was not appropriate for children in elementary schools. As a parent, I understood the value of allowing my child to read the next book in the series and, after reading it myself, decided the value of developing a life-long love of

reading outweighed concerns that the book may not be age-appropriate for all 5<sup>th</sup> grade children. I got to decide-and I made the right decision for my child, who annually re-reads the series.

Because of my personal and professional experience, I strongly oppose this legislation.

Thank you for your time.

Tammie Benham