

February 13, 2024

Rep. Adam Thomas
House Committee on Education
Kansas State Capital
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, KS 66612

Dear Rep. Thomas and the Education Committee,

I am a high school librarian at Shawnee Mission West in Overland Park, and I am writing this letter to express my opposition to HB 2700. As a parent of two children and a professional with over 20 years of experience in education, I have serious concerns about this bill.

First of all, HB 2700 is redundant. Parents can already access book reviews, plot synopses, and content warnings on websites such as Common Sense Media for guidance on what they choose to let their child read. It would be a waste of time and resources to attempt to rate every single book in a public school's library when other ways to preview a book's content already exist.

Additionally, who would be reading the books and assigning the ratings? Ratings are subjective, and it would be difficult for anyone to come to a consensus on how to rate a book, especially with everyone bringing their own biases to the table. Booklooks.org has been a possible resource mentioned to obtain book reviews and ratings, but who is writing these reviews? The website states, "We are concerned parents who have been frustrated by the lack of resource material for content-based information regarding books accessible to children and young adults." But who are "we"? The people writing these reviews are unnamed and have zero qualifications listed; therefore, we cannot determine if these reviewers are unbiased without their own hidden agendas. It is ridiculous to trust the opinion of anonymous reviewers more than the opinion of educated, trained, and experienced librarians who develop their collections based on professional reviews and awards.

Finally, every student deserves to see themselves in a book. Shawnee Mission West is the 4th most diverse high school in the Kansas City metropolitan area, and I work very hard to maintain a balanced book collection that reflects our school's population. Within such a diverse community, there are bound to be differing views and perspectives, which is reflected in our library. I am very concerned that the proposed rating system would unfairly target marginalized groups of students that have traditionally struggled to find themselves in literature.

There is a solution easier than rating thousands, if not millions, of books; we must understand that not every book is meant for every person because we are all different. It is the parents' right to select what their own child reads, but it is not within their rights to decide what every child can or cannot read. I have heard parents say the reason they object to a book is because the book is "inappropriate for ALL children." This statement absolutely cannot be used as a reason for removing a book from a library simply because no one person, including the Kansas House of Representatives, has the power to tell another parent what they can and can't let their child read. It would be a huge legislative overreach to proceed with HB 2700. If you think a book is inappropriate, simply don't allow your child to read it.

Thank you for your time,

Anne Stowers
Library Media Specialist
Shawnee Mission West High School