

Written testimony before  
House Committee on Education

On

HB 2700

By Marcel Harmon,  
parent and former school board member  
Lawrence, KS (USD 497)  
marcelharmon@gmail.com  
February 10, 2023

Chair Representative Thomas,

As a parent of students who directly benefited from public school libraries and librarians and a former school board member who saw the positive impacts of public school libraries within the district, I urge that this bill not be passed out of committee.

Our public schools do not need a school library rating system for the library materials that are available to students. Establishing a task force to develop this rating system is an attempt to circumvent the local authority of school boards, district administration, librarians, and even parents, while also adding onerous requirements to our public school districts that will no doubt go unfunded.

Public school districts already have policies in place regarding this. Districts already employ content area experts and library media specialists who are trained in choosing materials for school libraries that meet the educational and developmental needs of the age group of students being served by a given library. This task force, through its eventual proposed rating system, would essentially ignore all of this expertise and knowledge.

It should be noted that only one member is to be a school librarian appointed by the Kansas association of school librarians, and only one other member is required to be either a school board member or district superintendent. Only two out of nine members are required to have any sort of expertise or experience in this area. That is ridiculous.

Parents already have resources available to them if they want to find out information about the materials available in their local public libraries. All districts have policies in place to address concerns by parents, students, or other community members regarding specific materials. Such a rating system allows a vocal minority of people (who won't be experts in this area) to determine what is available for other parents' kids to access, infringing on parental authority.

My mom was a grade school librarian, and a damn good one. Not once did I ever hear her wish for the state legislature to overstep its constitutional authority (limited to funding public education) and tell her

how to do her job. She was also open to meeting with parents about their concerns. And guess what, that's the norm among our school library media specialists and content area experts.

Frankly, such a rating system is ultimately about banning books and other library materials. And book banning is all about maintaining power, controlling information, and undermining our institutions (including public education). It is poison to a functioning democracy. My mom was also (and still is) vehemently opposed to book banning.

I respectfully ask that you discard this bill and focus on staying in your legislative lane.