



Romaine Robert Quinn

STATE SENATOR • 25TH SENATE DISTRICT

From: Senator Romaine Robert Quinn
To: Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families
Re: Testimony on Senate Bill 597
Relating to: parental notification related to school library materials
Date: November 28, 2023

Thank you Chairman James and members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families for holding this public hearing on Senate Bill 597. This bill looks to provide more transparency to parents and guardians with what materials their child is allowed to access at school.

My colleagues and I have received numerous complaints from constituents regarding what materials their children are allowed to check out and are displayed in school libraries across the state. And so, we reached out to see what laws and policies currently exist surrounding this issue. Currently, Wisconsin has existing law that parents and guardians of children under the age of 16 can request the library records relating to the use of the library's documents or other materials, resources, or services by the child. Additionally, school boards in districts across the state should have policies in place for complaints that arise and the selection of library materials.

This bill will work in tandem with the current law by requiring school boards to develop a policy where the parent or guardian of a child under 16 is notified of each material the child checks out from the library no later than 24 hours after checkout. Additionally, the school board would have to annually notify parents and guardians whether or not the electronic collection of resources maintained by the Division of Libraries and Technology in the Department of Public Instruction is used by the district.

This bill puts the parent/guardian in the driver's seat to have conversations with their children about any materials that they find concerning or that they feel their child isn't ready to be exposed to. The onus should not be put on the librarian or aide to do this as long as they are following school board policies.

Thank you again for your consideration today.



BARBARA DITTRICH

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 38th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

November 28, 2023

Rep. Barbara Dittrich Testimony

Senate Bill 597 – Parental Notification Related to School Library Materials

Senate Bill 598 – Parental Notification Related to Public Library Materials

Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, and Children and Families

Thank you Chairman James, and members of the committee for your time today in hearing testimony on Senate Bill 597 and Senate Bill 598. I also want to thank Senator Quinn for authoring these bills with me and testifying in committee today.

I am old enough to remember when my school district superintendent was begging for parental engagement and participation. It wasn't that long ago that we wanted parents to work with educators for the mutually shared desire to help kids achieve.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 lockdowns ushered in a new season where there became a large chasm between parents and schools. As a result of "virtual" learning, parents suddenly became aware of numerous things being taught in the classroom and what their children were accessing in school and public libraries. Not every parent found those materials acceptable or appropriate. Many parents became angry. As a result, we have seen a large fracture over what children should and should not be allowed to access in library settings.

Both Senator Quinn and I, despite being from different parts of the state, have had conversations with constituents regarding access to materials in both our public and school libraries that parents have not felt appropriate for their child. That measure of appropriateness varies from parent to parent, and there are materials that have graphic content that would be deemed pornographic in other settings currently in libraries. However, since that measure of appropriateness does vary for each family, this matter has become very contentious throughout our state. It's time to bring the temperature down on this issue.

These bills would remedy that lack of parental knowledge without restricting materials that another parent might believe meets their child's maturity level. I think we have all seen some of the content that elementary school children were accessing without parental knowledge. Families have a right to preserve their own values and know that what their child is checking out from a library aligns with those values. I also believe parents know best when their child is ready to view certain content. Our goal with this legislation is not to further inflame the situation, but

rather to heal this fracture and get back to working on literacy. We simply want to provide this tool for parents so they can make those choices for their children and families.

Instead of being reactionary with draconian measures, these bills aim to give parents the means to monitor the content that their child is consuming, while not going as far as an all-out book ban, or restricted section of our libraries. These bills would help libraries and schools, providing for a reasonable mechanism to be put in place, one that is already in place in many of our public libraries in Wisconsin. I have never been in favor of “book banning” and I believe this offers a much simpler way to address this issue.

SB 597 and SB 598 would require libraries to develop and implement a parental notification system that would allow parents to be informed on the materials their child has checked out of the public or school library within 24 hours. This is a straight forward approach that neither limits what is checked out, nor removes books from the shelves. Rather, the notification system is a tool for parents and helps them remain in the driver’s seat, ensuring they can have conversations with their children and control appropriateness of content for those same children.

Further, SB 597 would require an annual notice to parents whether or not the school provides access to students to BadgerLink, the electronic collection of publications and reading materials as provided by DPI. Contents on BadgerLink have been the source of some contention in districts around the state and access to the site is optional for school districts.

In consultation with our public librarians and school library associations, we heard them share how they are often blamed for what a child reads or checks out. However, they shared that currently there are no parameters whatsoever on what a child can check out of the library. The example was given that a minor child may check out an R-rated movie at a self-checkout without any safeguard or notification to their parent or guardian. Additionally, there is no rating system for books themselves other than marketing categories. It would be impossible for our librarians to police what children are checking out. These bills would not place a ban, but parents should have the ability to know if they so choose.

In closing, I want to thank the parents who have reached out to share their request for legislation that would allow them to become more aware of the materials to which their children are exposed. Together, I think we can reasonably repair this fracture.



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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILLS SB 597 SB 598
SENATE COMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION, CHILDREN
AND FAMILIES
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2023
JACK HOOGENDYK, LEGISLATIVE & POLICY DIRECTOR

Thank you, Chair James and committee members, for the opportunity to testify on Senate bills 597 and 598. I am Jack Hoogendyk, Legislative and Policy Director for Wisconsin Family Action and we support these bills.

Mr. Chairman, a casual review of news stories on the internet reveals that across the country parents are expressing concern over the content of books and other materials on school and community library shelves. They see the need to create a safe and age-appropriate learning environment for their children. They want to protect their children from inappropriate and explicit content.

School and community libraries should be spaces where children can find information in a controlled and supervised manner without fear of exposure to pornography. Parents believe that the while there are first amendment considerations, they have the right to know what their children are reading so they can provide guidance and supervision.

The involvement of parents in their children's education is crucial for fostering academic success and overall well-being in several ways.

- It promotes a sense of collaboration between parents and educators in shaping a child's educational journey. By knowing what books their children are reading, parents can actively engage in discussions, provide context, and offer guidance, thereby enriching their learning experience.
- It enables parents to monitor their child's interests, facilitating a better understanding of their intellectual development. This insight allows parents to tailor home support, providing additional resources or guidance aligned with their child's preferences and curiosities.
- Being aware of the materials borrowed from the library empowers parents to discuss sensitive or challenging topics presented in books. It opens avenues for discussions on values, beliefs, and diverse perspectives, fostering critical thinking and empathy in children.
- Finally, parental involvement encourages a culture of accountability. It instills responsibility in children to make informed choices in their reading selections, knowing that their parents are aware and supportive.

A poll taken just last year by the RMG group (Scott Rasmussen) of over 1,200 respondents found that Eighty-four percent (84%) of voters believe that parents should be able to see all curriculum plans and materials for classes their children take, including the books they check out of the library. Only 12% disagreed.¹

Mr. Chairman, we need to remember that a child's parents are the first and most important teachers for that child. We need to do everything we can to allow and encourage parents to be involved in every aspect of their education.

We encourage this committee to approve SB 597 and SB 598.

¹ [84 Percent: Parents Should Be Able to See All Curriculum Plans, Materials | Newsmax.com](#)

TO: Senator James, Chair, Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families, and Committee Members

FROM: Kay Koepsel-Benning, President, Wisconsin Educational Media & Technology Association, president@wemta.org

RE: Senate Bill 597

Good Afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Kay Koepsel-Benning, and I am Director of Library Services for the Elmbrook Schools and President of the Wisconsin Educational Media and Technology Association. I appreciate the opportunity to provide committee members with more information about Senate Bill 597, which would require schools to notify the parents or guardians of all students under the age of 16 of every item they check out from the school library within 24 hours. To give you some context about the number of notifications that would be going out to parents, in my district alone, we have 7,800 students and average over 12,000 print and digital book checkouts **every week**, and 500,000 checkouts each year. We strongly believe that our literacy achievement results are supported by a robust collection of library materials and flexible access to print and online resources.

Under current federal law, parents have the right to access a student's check out information at any time. In Elmbrook, parents have always had online access to their students' checkout information, which is available for both our print and digital collections.

Two years ago, our School Board decided to revise board policy and create a **weekly** notification requirement, based on the interest of some parents. I think the experience of our district provides important information for the committee to consider as they review this bill.

The first lesson we learned is that it is impossible to offer a seamless notification system. While our print library database does have the capability of sending parent email notices our digital book collection does not. Given our experience, it would be very challenging for smaller districts to meet the notification requirements of the bill without additional staff resources - Elmbrook's solution would not be scalable.

The second lesson we learned is that parents can quickly become overwhelmed with information given the volume of checkouts. Our families, especially those with elementary children, told us they did not want to receive 5 to 20 individual emails each week for individual checkouts. Instead, some families requested, and our board supported through policy, a weekly email that aggregates both our print checkouts and digital checkouts into one email per household that includes all children in the family. Again, this solution required custom programming, new reporting from our library database vendors, and approximately 2 hours of work each week to compile the checkouts and send email notices to families. We manually aggregate the information as digital book vendors are not set up to provide this kind of reporting.

We are fortunate that our district has the resources to implement this solution, but recognize that most school districts in the state do not have similar resources. When considering SB597, I would ask committee members to consider that there is already an avenue for parents to review their child's checkout information. In our District this is done by sharing the student's login and password information with families. This level of access is real-time and provides the best level of detail to a student's checkout history. Thank you for your consideration.

TO: Senator James, Chair, Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families, and Committee Members

FROM: Emily Dittmar, Legislative Chair, Wisconsin Educational Media & Technology Association, legislative@wemta.org

RE: Senate Bill 597

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

I am the legislative chair of the Wisconsin Educational Media and Technology Association, which is the statewide association of school library professionals, and a public high school librarian in a suburban school district. Thank you for this opportunity to provide input on Senate Bill 597, which would require schools to notify the parent or guardian of every student under 16 about every item they check out from the school library within 24-hours of doing so.

It is a priority of school librarians to serve their students by getting them the appropriate material for them. In our pluralistic society, this is challenging and delicate work. However, it is important work.

In my district, we investigated the need and possibility of notifying parents about what their children were checking out from the school libraries. In our district, parents already have access to this information. We also have processes in place where parents can request a more tailored approach for their student like they can for any other information. A library record is treated the same as any other school record - there is no difference - and is currently accessible to parents to anyone under the age of 18. Therefore, what is being proposed under SB 597 is already covered under the federal FERPA law. If they need information to be sent to them within a 24 hour period, parents can work directly with their school library to have it provided to them. In my district, we provide the log in credentials of students to parents so that they can see in real time, at any time of day, what their child has checked out and their history. Being required to send this information to parents would be redundant. My district administration concluded that we had procedures in place for individual families to access this information and to provide more support if needed. It would be fiscally irresponsible to deploy a notification system to all parents when this isn't a need for all families. After reminding parents of how to access their child's library checkout history, no further requests were made.

As there is a staffing crisis and not all schools have a full-time, certified librarian, I am concerned that this will require a large amount of administrative time when there is not enough staff now. When this bill was discussed at a CESA Library Network meeting, there was a bit of panic on how this could be implemented. Please don't read this as a want to keep information from parents, but as a recognition of how big of a task this is. With school libraries so understaffed, dedicating so much time to administrative tasks takes certified librarians away from student interactions. Please consider how this bill could put a burden on schools both in personnel and on resources.

SB 597 would require that every parent of a student under the age of 16 receive this information, whether they want it or not. There is no option here for opting in or opting out. If they choose to do so, parents can request all of this information. This could put a burden on parents to sift through so much information that they will start to lose track of what is important to them. We have learned this from colleagues in Texas where a similar law is in place. There will be some parents who could get multiple emails a day depending on how many children they have and how avid of a reader their children are. This amount of information could overwhelm parents.

SB 597 also requires schools to provide notice to parents on whether or not they use BadgerLink. Wisconsin's Online Library (Badgerlink) is a collection of licensed, trustworthy resources that is curated for patrons of our state. Badgerlink is available to all Wisconsin residents. There is no log-in required. The resources are most utilized by students when required to do so by a class project. Librarians and Teachers help guide students to the best information for their learning targets. Like any other learning resource, like the internet, students have access.

Thank you for taking this time to listen to our experience. I encourage you to consider the challenges this bill would place on understaffed school libraries. Under current law, local school districts and parents have the ability to decide what is best for their students and resources.

Thank you for your consideration.