



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 Bills 598
Relating to: parental notification related to public 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 598. This bill is meant to provide parents with more transparency about what their child is checking out from the library.

I, as well as my colleagues, have been contacted by constituents over the past year who are concerned with what their children are being exposed to or checking out at libraries across the state. And so, we reached out to our public libraries to see what policies 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, public libraries have created complaint processes and are working on making those more known to the public.

This bill will work in tandem with the current law and policies of the library to require the notification of a parent or guardian of a child under the age of 16 of each document/material the child checks out as soon as practicable, but no later than 24 hours after checkout.

This 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 on the librarian or volunteer at the library to have these discussions with the children, as they should not be expected to figure out the differing parenting styles of each family. Additionally, many public libraries have a self-check-out system where a librarian may never interact with an individual in the whole check-out process.

As mentioned, we have had discussions with the Wisconsin Library Association regarding this bill. We know that one of their main concerns is that the technology to implement this bill is not at certain libraries, many of which are in my district. To solve this issue, we will be looking for more funding in the next budget to help the libraries accomplish the goal of this bill and update their systems.

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](https://www.newsmax.com/84-Percent-Parents-Should-Be-Able-to-See-All-Curriculum-Plans-Materials/)



WISCONSIN
LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION

November 28, 2023

Good afternoon Senator James and members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families:

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to testify today. I am Peter Loeffel, director of the Wauwatosa Public Library. With me are Nick Dimassis, director of the Beloit Public Library and Bradley Shipp, director of Outagamie Waupaca Library System, headquartered in Appleton. We are here on behalf of the Wisconsin Library Association.

We are appreciative of the efforts by Senator Quinn and Representative Dittrich to support parental involvement in public library use. However, we are opposed to SB598 for three main reasons:

- Parents already have a variety of options in place to support oversight of their children's library use.
- SB598 is creating a solution to a problem that does not exist. There are no barriers for parents to access their child's library accounts. In fact, parents routinely access this information in a way that works best for their family.
- Libraries would not be able to comply with the bill's requirements.

Wisconsin state statutes allow custodial parents or guardians to request library records relating to their child's use of the library, and public libraries have been diligent in complying with all statutory requirements.

We encourage parental involvement. Libraries have a variety of options in place to support parents' oversight of their children's library use. All public libraries in Wisconsin allow parents to review checked out items online, and many libraries also have apps that allow families to link library records so that a parent can view multiple accounts on their phone. The options that public libraries have in place allow parents to stay informed.

SB598 creates requirements for public libraries that they are not in a position to fulfill. There is no one communication method that public libraries can utilize to fulfill the mandate in SB598. Libraries serve a diverse community, and the communication tools that individuals prefer, or have access to, vary.

Public libraries provide Wisconsin families with the essential information services they need to succeed at school, at work, and in their personal lives. Libraries play a key role in independent learning, and support children and families with early literacy and reading readiness programs. Libraries contribute to the quality of life of Wisconsin residents through lifelong learning opportunities, and they deliver high value in a cost-effective manner through regional and statewide resource sharing.

Thank you for your consideration on this piece of legislation.

Sincerely,


Peter F. Loeffel

Chair, Wisconsin Library Association Library Development and Legislation Committee