

Chairman Bean, Ranking Member Bonamici, and members of the subcommittee: Thank you for having me today.

Today I sit here in front of you, wondering how in the world did we get here? How did we get from protecting our children to the argument of “stop book banning”? This is not a case of heterosexual vs LGBT+, nor is this a political issue or as many would call it “book banning.” This is about the innocence and protection of our children.

I would not expect my child to walk into one of your homes and be able to easily access playboys or pornographic photos, yet here we are today discussing the argument of these kind of books being accessible in our public school libraries all in the name of “education.”

I sit here in front of you as a mother of four. Three of whom were students of the public school system. What I have witnessed in the last 18 months being allowed access into our schools is appalling. Instead of education being the focus, we have completely lost our focus and now we have an issue of sexually explicit books being accessible to children 3 years old and older. Books easily available to children within their own school media centers.

One example is an innocent looking book with bright colors and a puppy dog on the front. To a 3-4 year old this book is appealing to them, yet the language of the book is far from appropriate. In the *Hide and Find* glossary, 3-4 year olds are encouraged to find images of “leather,” “drag queen,” and “underwear.” I want you to imagine very briefly with me that your 3 year old son, with a speech delay, who is in the school for a language delay, comes home with this book and also reads it in class. This was my story and one of the reasons I am before you today. When I found out this was available to my youngest son and would also be used as a curriculum, this mom began to speak up.

In my speaking up in front of my board of education, and asking questions of the appropriateness of these books and how they were not “age appropriate,” I found out that not only did parents not know they existed, but they had been approved by committees not even known to the lay public.

One book brought to my attention was *Gender Queer*, and the purchase of eight copies at one of our local high schools. Adults I know won't even look at this book, so let me tell you why. In the pages of this graphic novel, we see a sexual fantasy play out. If you need help imaging this book, in one portion of the book a strapped on penis is visible on the partner with oral sex being performed graphically. The next is of a sexual position of two young adults with both parties' private parts all being displayed. This is just one of 70+ books in my county's media libraries available to students 18 and younger. One school teacher alone requested eight copies of this book alone for the media center. Keep in mind policy states that any book can be also used as resources in classrooms.

I would like to address the lie that parental groups and Moms for Liberty are “book banning.” If removing a sexual explicit book from school libraries is what you see as book banning, then you

need to re-evaluate your language. These books are available to anyone who wishes to purchase them; all one has to do is go to your local public library, pull up your Amazon account, or go down to Barnes and Noble to buy these books or borrow them. The books that are being addressed are sexually explicit books, like the one example above, and go against the very laws and policies that state representatives of the people created. We call these laws in most states "Minor Indecency and Obscenity laws."According to my state,

Maryland Code CRIMINAL LAW § TITLE 11 - INDECENCY AND OBSCENITY Subtitle 2 - Obscene Matter Section 11-203 – Sale or display of obscene item to minor. States that "obscenity" is the act of human genitals in a state of sexual stimulation or arousal; acts of human masturbation, sexual intercourse, or sodomy; or fondling or other erotic touching of human genitals. This same law goes on to then state that it is Prohibited that any person may not willfully or knowingly display or exhibit to a minor. A person may not willfully or knowingly engage in the business of displaying, exhibiting, showing, or distributing to a minor an item with obscenity.

*Gender Queer* is one among many that parents groups and so-called "book banners" actually are speaking up against. Sexually detailed and explicit content does not belong in our schools. We are here asking you to actually uphold the very laws and policies that government officials have put in place to protect our children. We don't show "porn" in the name of education to children, so don't make this about the sexual orientation of one group versus the other. These are children, as young as 3 being exposed to these books. What will start as library (media) books will flow into the classrooms. Montgomery County is the perfect example, as they have become the pilot across the nation for the next phase of anything new, and it has been since the 70's from the research I have heard and seen. It already is spilling into the classrooms of elementary kids in my county.

It is time for us to be adults and leave the sexually explicit books out of schools and refocus our attention on the failing of our schools to our children in regards to reading, writing and mathematics. A generation of kids needs us to stop being divided over sexuality and stand up for the innocence of their minds.

How to start:

Parent representatives from all different walks of life should be a part of committees that review books. One of the things we have seen since we started to speak up at the board of education at our local level is the ability for parents to review and leave comments on all books in que for the library for 30 days. This gives them a voice in the material, and lets parents be a check and balance on what is coming into schools. The parents are advocates for their kids; we shouldn't be silencing them but rather refocusing on the innocence of children.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.