

Good afternoon,

I am an 18-year educator in both the classroom and the school library and currently serving as the president of the South Carolina Association of School Librarians. In my position, I have been called upon to support many librarians throughout the state who have experienced threats and harassment related to attempts to censor materials. I think it is important to share some of their stories with you because those who are threatening our kind, intelligent, hard-working librarians are using bills such as this to justify their actions.

An upstate middle school librarian:

I was called to a meeting to discuss why certain books should not be used in our schools. I was shocked because some of the books in question were South Carolina State Award Nominee books. Although I was not directly threatened in any way, the implication was that these books--books chosen for their merit of exploring diversity, inclusion, and social justice--which are what our students need to be global citizens, were not to be a part of the library's collection.

Two high school librarians in the midlands:

There was a small group of citizens (who didn't have children in the school system) who had been attending meetings in order to target books they didn't like and to call for more community oversight in the materials used and subjects taught in the schools. Even though it was against our School Board Policy, this group was allowed to call out myself and my colleague, as well as our Principal, by name. We were accused of putting pornography on our shelves. The Board meeting was live-streamed and put up on the District website. Our names were not removed until two days later when I complained that our safety was at risk by leaving this meeting up with our names in it. After this board meeting, I was concerned that these community members might call me or email me (both at work and at home) or find out where I live and show up at my house. These things didn't happen but I did think about it and worry about it for a while. If they will call people out by name at a public board meeting, they might do other things in order to influence and harass and bully people into doing what they want.

A librarian in the lowcountry:

A librarian in my district was involved with a book challenge last spring. She had extremely supportive school administrators and they followed our district's established reconsideration policy very carefully. This all started just before spring break, but all paperwork was submitted and the next step meeting was scheduled per the policy before spring break started. Even though the reconsideration process was clearly in progress and our policy was being followed to the letter, while we were on spring break this parent emailed all of our district Board members, all our legislators, and the State Superintendent of Education about this book challenge. In the emails, the parent questioned the librarian's professionalism and human decency. The librarian, a 15 + year educator who had been named Teacher of the Year and received many other honors, was called a "groomer" and accused of many other awful things by the parent. Similarly worded posts appeared in many community groups on social media. The librarian was identified by name and further vilified online. All of this happened while the librarian and her school were following all district policies and procedures to respond to the parent's concern and request for reconsideration. While

the book stayed in the library at the conclusion of the reconsideration process, the librarian did not stay. She left the school library. We lost an excellent educator and dedicated librarian because of the extreme harassment she experienced at the hands of a parent who believed that what they wanted for their child was more important than what other parents wanted for their own children, more important than following established district policies and procedures, and more important than the dignity and safety of the librarian.

High school librarian in the upstate:

I have been targeted on social media as having no morals or values and being someone who shouldn't be working in a school. I've been told in person—in small meetings and board meetings—that I have no standards, do not care about children, and have no ethics. I've been stared down as passages, taken out of context and read incorrectly—were read aloud at me. I have felt physical fear for my safety and won't go certain places without my husband.

Elementary librarian in the lowcountry:

I had a parent object to a star wars book based on the violence of the book - I found the objection unfounded, but in the name of parent relations and the fact that I had other star wars books, I removed the book. That was in May of last year. This was also the first time I've had a parent object and demand a book be removed. Of course I told her her child would not be allowed to check out star wars books, but that was not enough, so we removed the book for the 839 other students I have at my school. This year, beginning in September, the same parent objected to a book in a very popular, well-reviewed series because it had ghosts in it (as do MANY other books in our library that are perfectly acceptable for most of my students). The student had not checked the book out in the library and it is actually in a section that 1st graders don't have access to, but she was concerned that someone else could check it out and her child could see it. This time, I did not remove it. Our district followed the challenge policy and thankfully the committee and superintendent agreed that the book should not be removed. I'm not sure this qualifies as harassment, but the time, effort and stress caused by one parent over what we have in the library cannot be overstated. I did learn not to remove books in the name of making peace as it seemed to fuel the misguided fervor of this particular parent.

Elementary librarian:

I was a veteran classroom teacher-turned-librarian who became the victim of a vicious book challenge at the elementary level. A sweet, first grade patron checked out a book and took it home to read with her family. The story explained the symbolism of the rainbow flag in an age-appropriate way. The mother contacted the classroom teacher and demanded a meeting with the principal, who instead forwarded the message to me. I reached out to the mother and was accused of indoctrination, grooming, and attacking Christianity. A formal reconsideration was initiated, and ended up at the district level.

In the meantime, I was targeted in thousands of comments in local Facebook groups, some private/some public, some individual/some organizations, and received threats on my property, my professional credentials, and my LIFE. I was the only librarian at my school, my name is on the website, and I'm not hard to find. It was terrifying. I experienced panic attacks and lost many nights

of sleep. My children, also students at two different schools in the district where I worked, were blindsided at school with accusations and lies about their mother. Their educational environment was brutally disrupted, and the situation was physically and emotionally distressing for all of us. Another painful realization was that some students with whom I'd previously had wonderfully rewarding educational relationships were quiet, disengaged, and seemingly scared of me. Some stopped participating in library activities, others stopped checking out books, and a select few became disruptive and disrespectful, which ruined the library experience for others. When I did car duty, parents wouldn't talk to me - a few even refused to let me open the door for their children. No librarian, no parent, and no child should have to deal with the conditions my family and I endured. They were stressful, disrespectful, and uncivilized.

High school librarian in the upstate:

The last time the state legislature considered legislation very similar to H. 3728, it had a profound impact on my personal and professional life. Not in a positive way. I had just been named the winner of the South Carolina School Librarian of the Year Award, which is the honor of a lifetime. I should have been able to celebrate my achievement. I spent 15 years working in public schools in South Carolina in service to my profession and students. Yet I became the target of vicious attacks caused directly by rhetoric used in legislation like H. 3728.

When you propose legislation like this, you imply that there is some problem that needs to be corrected through the law and by extension punishment. State senator Josh Kimbrell and State representative Steven Long have long been involved in this anti-education rhetoric and didn't pass up a political opportunity to start attacking me. Both posted messages on their Facebook pages targeting me, suggesting that I put pornographic books in schools. People posted replies to their posts and sent me threatening messages, one person saying he was going to find me. People said I should be put in prison. Another person found my home address and posted it to a thread on Corey Allen's page, a blogger to whom Josh Kimbrell regularly gives interviews. People even called my school, suggesting I should be fired.

Local talk show radio host Charlie James joined in the fray, another person to whom Josh Kimbrell regularly grants interviews. He said on the air in two different episodes that I put pornography in schools, mocked my Master's degree in Library and Information Science, pejoratively called me an activist, and said I showed pornography to my students.

Josh Kimbrell even wrote a letter to the South Carolina Association of School Librarians asking them to rescind my school librarian of the year award because he disagreed with my acceptance of books which the state via Henry McMaster deemed pornographic.

So while it may seem reasonable to you to pass legislation prohibiting concepts in schools, in practical application, it has devastating effects for those of us who live in the real world. If you spent even a little bit of time in public schools, you would see for yourselves that there is no indoctrination in place in SC schools. As elected officials, it would be a dereliction of duty to simply buy into political rhetoric related to "critical race theory." These malicious attacks on my character

and professional work have changed my life. I have had the police drive by my house as a way of protection when I received threatening messages.

Please take this into consideration and my request that you refrain from resorting to political talking points. I am not a political pawn in your careers. I am someone who has worked for almost 2 decades to better the lives of students in our state, and I have the right to live free from fear of state legislators.

Thank you for taking the time to read these stories and hear about the real-life consequences of these laws. I hope you will not support this bill, but instead support the amazing educators and librarians we have in South Carolina and put your support behind their expertise and the laws and policies we already have in place to provide our students with the best possible education. We have real problems in South Carolina. This bill does nothing to address those.

Sincerely,
Tamara Cox
SCASL President, 22-23