

Pornography Should NOT Be Accessible to Kids in Public Libraries



Idaho's new law requiring libraries to remove pornography from children's sections has somehow become controversial. At its core is a simple question: **Should the State of Idaho protect kids from exposure to graphic sexual content?** For most people, the answer is an obvious **yes**.

We already accept this principle almost everywhere else. It is a crime for the neighbor to expose a minor to pornography. Grocery stores cover explicit magazines. Video stores separate adult content. Movie theaters provide ratings—all to protect children. The Supreme Court is clear: there is **no first amendment right** to expose minors to graphic sexual material.

I appreciate librarians. Many are excellent. Importantly, Idaho's new law holds **institutions**, not individual librarians, accountable. Unfortunately, over the past three years legislators have seen undeniable evidence that some institutions refuse to remove graphic sexual content from children's sections. The materials we have reviewed were so obscene they couldn't be distributed on the House floor or read aloud in hearings. Because they cannot be publicly displayed, some claim there's no problem.

Legislators who reviewed the materials know otherwise. In fact, a super-supermajority of Republican legislators in both House and Senate overwhelmingly supported ensuring that libraries do not provide this content to children.

Some falsely claim that the law is vague. It is not. Idaho law provides a clear, three-pronged definition of "material harmful to minors." The material must depict specific body parts and sexual acts; it must be intended to arouse; and it must be clearly offensive to prevailing community standards minors. The materials reviewed—found in children's sections—clearly met these standards. Some included graphic depictions of rape, incest, and the sexual abuse of children.

Others argue this violates "local control." Local control works when local boards are responsive to parents. When they are not—especially when they engage in conduct that would be criminal if done by anyone else—the state has a role. Criminal law is a state function. No one claims laws against theft, assault, or obscenity in other circumstances are improper violations of "local control."

Some warn the law will be financially burdensome. One librarian claimed a new room would be required to house the material. When asked how much content actually met the legal definition, she quickly backtracked. The law is costly only if there is a massive pornography problem in

libraries. If that were, the law would be even more necessary. In reality, the concern over cost is greatly exaggerated.

Others claim libraries have no workable solutions because they employ teens. Yet, it's illegal for teens to sell cigarettes or alcohol also and we expect businesses to manage. Protecting children—including teen employees—is worth minor inconvenience.

Claims that the law violates parental rights are another red herring. Idaho parents were the ones asking for state action! Requiring obscene material to be placed in adult sections protects parental rights: parents who want their kids to have access to materials can provide them, and parents who don't want their kids exposed are respected.

Children should never be exposed to graphic depictions of rape, incest, and abuse without parental knowledge or consent—especially not at taxpayer expense. The enforcement mechanism is modest: a \$250 fine, and only if a parent is willing to assume the legal risk of bringing a suit. Institutions that take reasonable steps to protect minors are legally protected under the statute.

It is genuinely shocking that my opponent has chosen this largely Democrat-driven fringe issue as a primary attack in a Republican race. Pornography is harmful to children. Taxpayer-funded libraries should not distribute it to kids. The flood of explicit content children already face is bad enough. Our taxpayer funded libraries should be one place that IS safe.

Kind regards,
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