

## **Statement of Opposition to HF2309**

*From Skip Dye, Chairman, Penguin Random House Intellectual Freedom Taskforce*

Chair and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of Penguin Random House and our Intellectual Freedom Taskforce, I write in strong opposition to **HF2309**.

HF2309 would fundamentally alter how public libraries operate in Iowa — not by improving services, but by criminalizing librarians, weakening local control, and undermining long-standing constitutional protections.

First, the bill revives and expands the same “material harmful to minors” framework used in 2023’s SF496, legislation that remains under active litigation. Reintroducing a legally contested standard into criminal law invites further constitutional conflict and uncertainty for public institutions.

Second, HF2309 eliminates the longstanding obscenity exemption for libraries and educational institutions. Let’s be clear: public libraries do not stock obscene material. They curate age-appropriate collections guided by professional standards, community needs, and established law. Removing this exemption exposes librarians, trustees, and municipalities to criminal and civil liability simply because someone objects to a book that is not legally obscene. That is not public policy — that is intimidation.

Third, the bill mandates permission slips and reading record tracking. Iowa has historically protected reader privacy. Forcing libraries to monitor and document what individuals read undermines that tradition and creates serious privacy concerns. Libraries are one of the last places where citizens can explore ideas without surveillance. That principle should not be discarded lightly.

Fourth, HF2309 imposes costly and impractical structural mandates — requiring adult sections to be physically separated and catalogued in specific ways. This is government micromanagement of local institutions and would divert limited public funds away from literacy, programming, and community services toward unnecessary construction and compliance burdens.

Finally, the bill removes local authority from library trustees by dictating reconsideration policies from the state level. Iowa’s public libraries are governed locally for a reason: communities are best positioned to establish thoughtful, transparent review processes. Centralizing this authority erodes local governance rather than strengthening it.

Libraries are not partisan spaces. They are repositories of diverse viewpoints serving families, students, and lifelong learners. Criminalizing professional librarians and threatening municipalities with litigation will not protect children — it will chill access to constitutionally protected materials and discourage talented professionals from serving Iowa communities.

We urge the Committee to reject HF2309 and instead work collaboratively with librarians, educators, parents, and constitutional experts to support policies that strengthen — rather than destabilize — Iowa's public libraries.

Respectfully,

**Skip Dye**

Chairman, Intellectual Freedom Taskforce  
Penguin Random House