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LD 1395

LD 1395 ought not to pass.

The databases our school librarians across the state use in our school libraries are already vetted and set with safeguards to best ensure our young people access reliable, developmentally appropriate, purposeful information.

Our professional school librarians already work diligently to align resources to the curricular goals of the district, buildings, and classrooms with whom they work. The databases to which schools subscribe and the databases accessed through the Maine State Library Network are intentionally chosen to align to these goals.

Further limiting access to reliable and relevant information in times when budgets are already stretched thin is fiscally irresponsible. Federal funding for libraries is being stripped daily based on partisan politics rather than intellectual, scientific, academic, or Constitutional reasoning.

This act seems to be more of the same efforts that have led to book bans across the country -- censorship and control from a particular political point of view based on moralistic alarmism and deeply conservative religious doctrine with little regard to evidence.

As a parent of two school age children and a veteran public school educator, I want my children and their teachers to have access to the most reliable, robust, and purposeful information possible so they may learn to think critically, solve problems, and make meaning. Limiting their access to these databases based on the false assumption that they are likely to see an inappropriate image on a database that already has filters in place goes against the mission of our libraries and the mission of public education.

Furthermore, I have a unique perspective on the subject of human trafficking prevention education. As a consultant for the Nest Foundation, I have written curriculum, designed learning activities and trained educators around the country about the dangers of human trafficking and the importance of teaching violence prevention in our schools. Human trafficking is one of several terrible outcomes from unchecked violent behaviors and patterns in our society. Teaching about this all-too prevalent outcome is one of the best ways to raise awareness of the grooming and exploitative violence that precedes it.

Most people do not realize the full gamut of human trafficking spectrum which ranges from non-consensual sharing of images to bodily enslavement. We should all know that there are malicious actors using solicited and unsolicited images of young people for financial gain and exploitative control. Young men in particular are more likely to face extortion for such images.

If we want to prevent human trafficking, ideally we should invest in violence and human trafficking prevention education. In lieu of that, we must keep access to the information and resources educators need to help our young people make choices that diffuse violence, that advocate for human rights and dignity, and allow them to develop into the next generation of problem solvers.

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