

February 20, 2023

Dear Ways and Means Committee:

The below signed members of the Harford County Board of Education are contacting you to share our strong opposition to House Bill 785: Freedom to Read Act.

This deceptively titled bill is anathema to freedom. This legislation would deny this Board of Education and other local Boards of Education the authority to exercise control over school library policies and standards. If this legislation is enacted, all school libraries will be mandated to align with “State Standards for Libraries.” Failure to follow a top down approach and adoption of the State defined standards will result in withholding of funds if the local policies do not conform to State standards. This legislation is a blatant attempt to remove the powers and authority of the local Boards of Education. This legislation will exempt librarians from challenges to their decision to curate books that violate the authority of this Board of Education to make policies for their school systems in favor of State Standards.

This bill is yet another threat to our local authority as members of the Harford County Board of Education and removes local control for decisions regarding school library curation policy.

In these alarming and unprecedented ways, HB 785 reaches into the boardroom, severely limiting decisions and policy making of local boards of education, superintendents, department chairs, and librarians in our schools.

As members of the Board of Education of Harford County, we urge you to support local decision-making authority in developing policies and curriculum, assessments, grading policies, and instructional programs and the adoption of statewide laws and regulations that reflect a commitment to local governance, professional judgment of local educators, and community engagement. HB 785 fails this test. For these reasons, the undersigned members of the Harford County Board of Education urges an Unfavorable Report for HB 785.

We thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

*Melissa Hahn*

Melissa Hahn

Vice President

Harford County Board of Education

*Terri Kocher*

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Member

Harford County Board of Education