

2024-02-23 SB738 (Support).pdf

Uploaded by: Adam Spangler

Position: FAV

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February 23, 2024

TO: The Honorable Brian Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Adam Spangler
Legislative Aide, Legislative Affairs, Office of the Attorney General

RE: Senate Bill 738 - Freedom to Read Act - **Support**

The Office of the Attorney General requests a favorable report on Senator Nancy King's Senate Bill 738 - Freedom to Read Act. Senate Bill 738, the Freedom to Read Act, seeks to accomplish several actions which will protect Maryland Libraries and its workers.

Senate Bill 738 (SB738) will establish a set of State Standards for Libraries that enshrines into law that Library materials exist and should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all persons that the Maryland library serves. SB738 further establishes that a library should not exclude material from its catalog because of the origin, background, or views of a person who created the material, and that a library should not proscribe or remove material from its catalog because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

SB738 also requires Maryland libraries, school libraries, resources centers, and any other libraries to adopt and follow a written policy consistent with these standards. Additionally, SB738 will protect school and public library workers by preventing punitive actions being taken against them for their adherence to the standards. Finally, this legislation will protect all the

public library collections from planned attempts to take or damage materials by increasing fines for offenders.

Maryland Libraries have seen a 133% increase in formal challenges to their collections, and a 263% increase in informal challenges.¹ In a September 2023 survey by the Maryland Association of School Librarians (MASL), 70% of respondents reported book challenges in their school districts.² The MASL survey also found that 52% of school librarians reported that book challenges have made their job more difficult and 42% said book challenges have had a negative impact on their personal lives and/or interactions in their communities.³

Marylanders should not be kept from learning about the realities of our world because a small vocal few who disagree with who an author is, who they love, or who they worship. Marylanders deserve to see themselves reflected in the books they read, the art they see, and the history they learn. Maryland's library collection allows our readers to become critical thinkers, exposed to ideas that they may disagree with, proud of what our nation has overcome, and thoughtful about what comes next.

Senate Bill 738 will safeguard Maryland libraries from becoming the next frontier of censorship, protecting literature and the freedom for readers to choose for themselves.

For the foregoing reasons, the Office of the Attorney General requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 738.

cc: The Honorable Nancy King
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee Members

¹ Book Challenge Survey, MSLA, Retrieved 2.16.24

² Maryland Book Challenge Impact Survey, MASL, 10.10.23

³ *I.D.*

Worcester United SB738 Support Ltr.pdf

Uploaded by: Alissa Carr

Position: FAV

Worcester United

Worcester and surrounding stakeholders (parents, grandparents, caregivers) organized to defend public education. The primary purpose of this group is to support all students by ensuring an inclusive school environment.

February 21, 2024

LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY - SB738

Submitted on behalf of Worcester United

To the Honorable Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

The 800 members of Worcester United are asking for your support of the Freedom to Read Act (HB785/SB738). The Freedom to Read Act ensures access for our group's most valuable asset, the students of Worcester County. Intellectual freedom is an inherent right established in our society and extends to all people, regardless of age. Any attempt to erode this freedom inhibits our students from being competitive in a global society.

As parents and community members from a rural conservative district, we see the need to protect access to ideas in all libraries. After three years of repeated attempts to censor materials in our school and public libraries, Worcester United is hopeful that the Freedom to Read Act will secure the access that our students need.

These bills will codify Maryland's commitment to *open and inclusive access* to library materials as well as requiring all libraries to have in place policies as to how they go about selection and maintenance of their collections. It will further *hold our librarians to policies and procedures* outlined for them to follow.

These bills will protect our school and public librarians who have the best interest of the communities they serve at the heart of everything they do.

Worcester County Public Schools already have policies and procedures in place to limit access to certain materials if directed to do so by parents/guardians. This information has been shared publicly and vetted so those that need the information have it at their fingertips. These policies and procedures should be protected.

The safety and well-being of ALL students is at the heart of what we do and we respectfully request you will support the passage of the Freedom to Read Act and keep intellectual curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking at the heart of teaching and learning in Worcester County and all of Maryland.

Sincerely,

Worcester United

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/worcesterunited>

MD Freedom to Read Support Letter.pdf

Uploaded by: Arnessa Dowell

Position: FAV

An open letter to the Maryland General Assembly
Support of The Freedom to Read Act of 2024 (HB 785 / SB738)

As a Maryland resident and dedicated library worker, I wholeheartedly endorse the sentiments expressed in this testimony. Libraries are not just repositories of books; they are dynamic spaces where knowledge is cultivated and shared, essential for nurturing informed and engaged communities.

In my role, I witness firsthand the profound impact librarians have on shaping young minds and promoting critical thinking skills. We are the stewards of intellectual freedom, diligently curating collections that reflect diverse perspectives and ensuring equitable access to information for all. Our commitment to these principles is unwavering, as we believe that knowledge should be freely accessible to everyone.

The Freedom to Read Act of 2024 (HB 785 / SB738) is a critical piece of legislation that recognizes the vital role libraries play in upholding democratic values. By establishing clear guidelines for collection policies and bolstering protections against theft and damage, this bill empowers library workers to carry out our mission without fear of unwarranted interference.

Importantly, the Act also includes provisions to safeguard library workers from harassment and intimidation, acknowledging the professionalism and dedication of our staff. This protection is essential for ensuring that we can continue to serve our communities without fear of reprisal.

I strongly urge the Maryland General Assembly to swiftly pass this legislation. By doing so, they will not only uphold the principles of intellectual freedom but also reaffirm their commitment to supporting the essential work of library workers across the state. Together, we can ensure that Maryland's libraries remain vibrant centers of learning and discovery for generations to come.

Respectfully submitted,

Arnessa Dowell

SB 0738 Support Freedom to Read Act SMRLA Teagle.p

Uploaded by: Ashley Teagle

Position: FAV

February 22, 2024

Senator Brian Feldman, Chair
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Committee Members,

I am writing in support of **SB 0738 Freedom to Read Act**. This legislation is necessary to counteract a national movement that has now reached Maryland to censor library materials and to intimidate library workers who uphold organizational policy.

In the summer of 2023, I collaborated with a colleague to distribute a statewide survey to learn more about the challenges libraries in Maryland are facing and to learn about what support library workers needed. Survey respondents were asked to limit responses to their experiences over the past year.

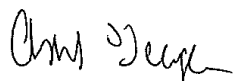
Just over 43% of respondents said they had experienced school library book challenges; over 21% experienced challenges to public library displays and programs; and 15% experienced public library book challenges.

A Calvert County respondent noted there have been "...complaints to the county commissioners about where certain books are shelved." In St. Mary's County, "...A resident has also written letters to the editor of the local media outlet, mailed letters to people in the community, and gone to a public county budget hearing to ask that the library be defunded as long as it has any books that Florida Governor DeSantis has on his 'bad' list."

I support the efforts of Senator King, Speaker Jones, Delegate Jones and all of the bill sponsors to ensure Maryland's libraries remain welcoming places for all and a space where civil dialogue can happen during a discussion about a good book. As Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, professor emerita at Ohio State University and children's literature scholar, said: "When there are enough books available that can act as both mirrors and windows for all our children, they will see we can celebrate both our differences and our similarities."

Thank you for your support and consideration.

Sincerely,



Ashley Teagle
CEO

Book Challenge Impact-Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Brittany Hulme Tignor

Position: FAV

SB0738

FAV

The following article was written as a blog post for Maryland Association of School Librarians. The statistics and information gathered clearly explains why HB785 is important legislation that is necessary to ensure libraries are able to provide services to citizens across the state.

Impact of Book Challenges in Maryland

By Brittany Tignor and Jennifer Sturge

Introduction

Books are being removed from school library shelves across the nation, and Maryland has not been exempt from this movement. Books about race, racism, LGBTQ+ identities, and violence remain a top target of the book banning movement in 2023 according to PEN America. ALA reports that in 2022, 2,571 titles were challenged across the US as opposed to 223 in 2020. PEN America reported a 33% increase in book bans in 2022-2023 compared to 2021 data. A large share of the 3,362 individual bans of books took place in states where legislation has passed or there has been a coordinated effort by local and national groups to restrict access to books. During this time, MASL has been receiving advocacy requests; while the numbers are not as large as national data, the 18 requests represent 8 districts and increased from 0 in 2020 to 8 in 2023. MASL Board Members have talked with school boards, media outlets, and ALA to advocate for students to have access to the titles that reflect all students.

While MASL can speak clearly and confidently about policy, procedure, position statements, and school library values, our organization could not tell with certainty the full picture of book challenges and bans in our state. MASL didn't have a comprehensive picture of how the increase in book challenges was impacting school librarians across the state. In September 2023, our organization surveyed our membership about their experiences with challenges and changes to policy. This initial article is being released to summarize the results of the Maryland Book Challenge Impact Survey. Please note, further analysis is forthcoming.

Summary of findings

Between September 19 and September 25, 2023, MASL collected 175 responses from 23* public school districts and 5 independent schools. Of the public districts, all but 3 districts had at least one respondent report that there had been a book challenge between the 21-22 SY and present day; none of the independent schools reported a book challenge. During that same time, 18% of School Librarians reported having book challenges at their school library, and 60% of school librarians reported knowing someone else who dealt with a challenge. Over 20% of respondents reported knowing more than 5 school librarians dealing with a challenge.

If a book from your collection is challenged, do you feel confident in defending it?

175 responses

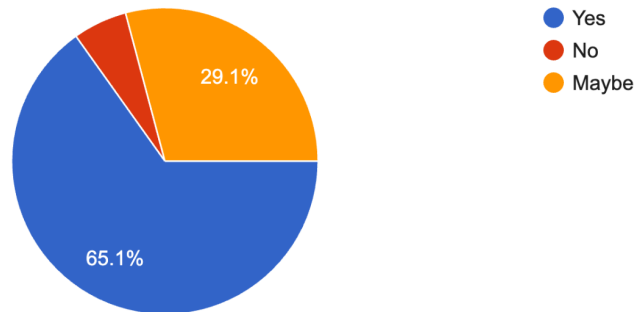


Figure 1: Percentage of school librarians who feel confident in handling a book challenge in their library.

The results of the survey indicate that school librarians feel confident in how to deal with book challenges. Over 65% reported feeling confident that they could handle a book challenge (Fig. 1) and the same percentage said they felt confident or very confident in their ability to handle the challenge.

At the same time, school librarians reported a high level of trust in decision making and confidence in getting support at the school and district level during book challenge situations and the majority (over 75%) report receiving professional development from their school library supervisor on the policy and procedures in place in their district (Fig. 2) Of those who responded to the survey, the data indicates that school librarians feel confident that they would have support from their administration in their individual school and in their district. More school librarians feel confident their central office would support their collection decisions than their administration. The same held true for a challenge. (Fig. 3) This prompt did not distinguish between library supervisors and other leaders at the district level, but at least one respondent mentioned having, “confidence in my supervisor’s support,” but not board of education members.

Have you been provided professional development on your district's policies and procedures for book reconsideration by your school library supervisor or the central office of your district?

175 responses

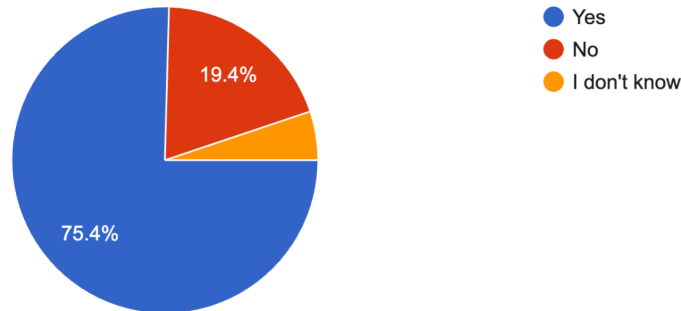


Figure 2: School librarians in Maryland who have received professional development from their district supervisor.

Support. Please rate the amount of support you feel for each item. 0 is no support, 5 being very supported.

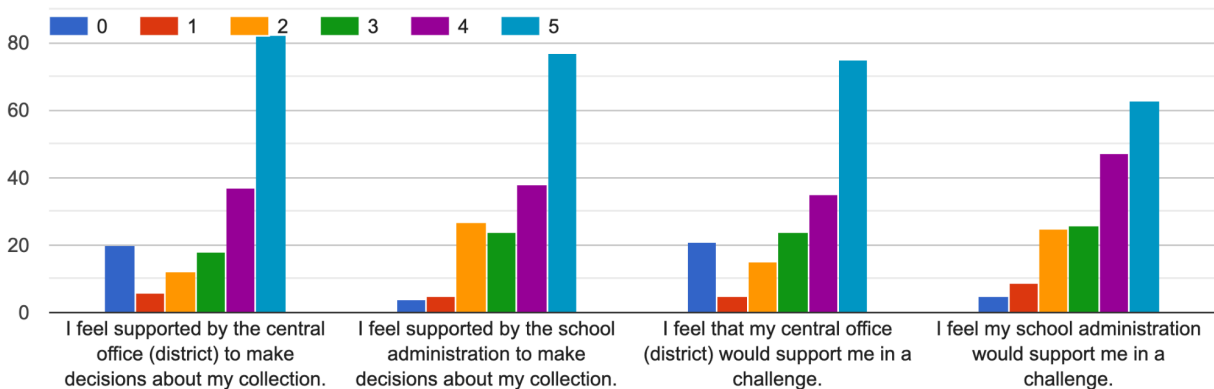


Figure 3: Support at the central office and administration of building

As part of the survey, MASL asked members to report on the implications of book challenges in relation to their feelings about their job. More than half (57.1%) of the respondents said that book challenges in general have made their job more difficult and a little less than half (42.3%) said book challenges are having a negative impact on their personal life. Some librarians reported being yelled at in public or voiced fear because of angry community members and

parents. School librarians reported that they have been called “groomers,” that they are “politically indoctrinating students,” and providing “porn” to students.

Have you avoided purchasing a book for your library collection because you were afraid that it may be "controversial" even though it meets selection criteria and policy?

172 responses

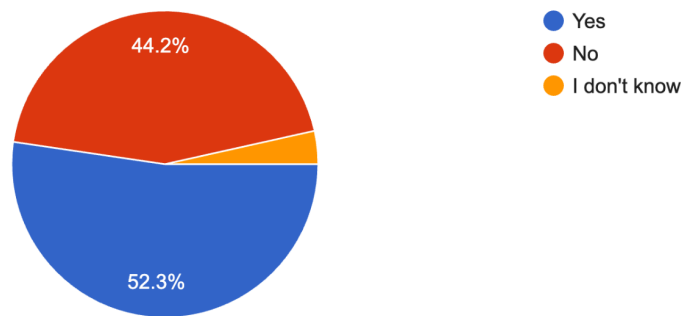


Figure 4: School Librarians have begun to avoid purchasing “controversial” books.

More than half of the school respondents reported a type of soft censorship by avoiding purchasing a book for fear of negative consequences. (Fig. 4) Some reported being “fearful” of purchasing a book even though they knew that there were students who could benefit from it because they would receive pushback from parents. Others stated that they “second-guessed” their decisions when it came to purchasing books because of a sense of fear of repercussions and losing their jobs. School librarians also reported that some of the policies and procedures put into place by their district increased the time required for purchasing and made placing orders “next to impossible” by creating copious amounts of paperwork and requiring every book to be read before it was placed on the shelf. School librarians reported school and/or district administrators suggesting removal of books in order to avoid controversy.

Only 11 respondents didn’t know their policies and procedures and fewer than 25% of respondents reported lacking professional development on those procedures. Respondents mentioned strong adherence to selection policies as well as frustration when selection policies and reconsideration policies are not followed.

School librarians reported being frustrated with how small groups of parents could change the entire culture of a school community. They reported that they felt that their expertise was not valued and that some parents and community members did not recognize that they have master’s degrees in their field and have been trained in selection and collection development.

Discussion

While these community groups may be getting the reactions they want in some places, school librarians are standing strong in the belief that all students deserve to have books that reflect their lives. When it comes to purchasing books that are controversial, librarians reported spending more time ensuring that their orders followed policy and second-guessing themselves; however, just as many librarians reported continuing to purchase books that might lead to controversy in order to ensure access and representation.

The resilience demonstrated by respondents was admirable. There is a significant amount of fear and frustration in school librarians, but there is just as much confidence that they are doing the right thing even if it isn't the easy thing. Despite the fact that almost all districts have had at least one challenge since the 21-22 SY and most school librarians know someone who has dealt with a challenge in their school, very few school librarians are giving up. Very few librarians mentioned questioning whether they would continue in the profession.

At first, it was difficult to reconcile the fear with the sense that school and district administrators trust decision making and would support librarians in challenges. It seems like the two would go hand in hand; people would be fearful because they didn't feel supported. After looking through the open-ended responses again, the school librarians feared more for their students. School librarians want to do the best job that they can. Their biggest fear is not being able to provide the things that their students need, but they also want to do so in a responsible manner and work to follow any and all policies and procedures set out for them. When community and parent groups "vilify" them as many respondents reported, there is a fear that they are not doing a good job.

Immediate Actions

MASL recognizes that the battles of book challenges are fought in individual conversations and large protests, at kitchen tables and school board meetings, by students and corporations. MASL's Advocacy Committee meets regularly to discuss issues, strategy, and next steps. They have developed campaigns, letters, and alerts. While MASL can and will continue to speak out on behalf of school librarians across the state, we also recognize that our members need access to tools that allow them to be able to advocate for themselves at a moment's notice. MASL is actively working to update our advocacy toolkit and to provide more resources to members.

MASL will be curating and crowd sourcing resources and materials that will allow everyone in the Maryland School Library community to have resources related to book challenges at their fingertips. If you have a resource for advocacy or want to contribute to our toolkit, please add your resource to this [document](#).

MASL has also created a members only forum which can be accessed [here](#). You will need to be signed into the MASL website to access this resource and add to the different discussions. This is a place to stay up to date with what is happening across the state.

To directly report a book challenge to MASL, please email challenges@maslmd.org This will help us to keep a database of challenged books and prepare responses.

Further Exploration

As MASL moves forward in our investigation of book challenges across the state, we plan on investigating the following questions:

- Does the data differ significantly when there has been a “difficult” challenge situation?
- How many people mention an increased workload?
- How many people mention health problems (physical and mental)?

Final Thoughts

MASL would like to remind members that they are not alone. There is power in the collective voice, so continue to speak out and speak up when something is happening in your district, community, or another district. Feel free to utilize the [advocacy now form](#) on the MASL website or email: advocacy@maslmd.org

*One additional district responded via email saying that they have not had any challenges, but are reviewing their selection policies and procedures due to the book challenges in other areas of the state.

SB0738_Freedom_to_Read_Act_MLC_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Cecilia Plante

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY FOR SB0738 Freedom to Read Act

Bill Sponsors: Senator King

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Aileen Alex, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0738 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of individuals and grassroots groups with members in every district in the state with well over 30,000 members.

MLC supports a bill that requires our state-funded libraries operate by state standards and that employees cannot be dismissed if they are operating within the context of the state standards.

Our values are consistent with the state standards set forth in this bill. These standards enforce our basic rights: library materials, services, and resources exist and should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all persons the library serves; a library should not exclude material from its catalogue because of the origin, background, or views of a person who created the material; and a library should not prohibit or remove material from its catalogue because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

It is a shame in the period in U.S. history of book bans and book burnings, that these standards must be legislated. We agree the standards should be legislated and enforced, though.

The Maryland Legislative Coalition supports this bill and recommends a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.

SB738_MSEA_Lamb_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Cheryl Bost

Position: FAV

FAVORABLE
Senate Bill 738
Freedom to Read Act

Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
February 23, 2024

Cheryl Bost
MSEA President

The Maryland State Education Association strongly supports Senate Bill 738, which would require public libraries, including school libraries, to adopt standards that deter book banning and ensure that everyone has access to a rich and inclusive collection of literature and resources. It would also establish protections for school-based library media specialists who uphold those standards.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

All children deserve a high-quality education that helps them think critically about the world and prepare for a better future. Yet public schools and libraries across the country are facing a wave of politically motivated attempts to ban and restrict books and educational materials that celebrate diversity and grapple honestly with history. These extremist campaigns typically target books with authors and characters who are people of color or LGBTQ+. Educators work hard to provide an honest and inclusive education to all students: erasing people who look like them from school libraries is antithetical to that goal.

From Carroll County to Montgomery County, Maryland has not been immune to book bans and curriculum challenges. Beyond the direct impact of these restrictions, implemented or simply proposed, is a widespread chilling effect on school and library content that should alarm everyone who wants students to have a high-quality and complete learning experience. Most



Marylanders do not support book bans, but all students are suffering the effects of a vocal few who seek to politicize their education.

This bill is modeled after similar measures in other states that have already taken action to protect honesty in education and resist partisan attacks. It is urgently necessary that we affirm Maryland students' right to read and learn, and this legislation is an important step to that end.

We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 738.

SB738.pdf

Uploaded by: Christine Feldmann

Position: FAV



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(he/him)

Vice-Chair

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(they/them)

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David Jones
(he/him)

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(she/her)

Jessica Parsell
(she/her)

Sarah Sample
(she/her)

Joshua Seefried
(he/him)

Jayne Walters
(she/her)

Tim Williams
(he/him)

BILL: Senate Bill 738 - Freedom to Read Act

DATE: February 22, 2024

POSITION: FAVORABLE

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, Environment

CONTACT: Christine Feldmann | christine@annapolispride.org

Annapolis Pride's mission is to advocate for, empower, and celebrate our LGBTQ+ community in Anne Arundel County to live fully and authentically. Our vision is a safe, equitable, and anti-racist community where people of all identities thrive. As such, Annapolis Pride supports Senate Bill 738 - the Freedom to Read Act.

Our nation's libraries and librarians are under attack. In the first eight months of 2023, the American Library Association reported challenges to nearly 2,000 unique titles representing a 20% increase over the same period in 2022. Even in our state, small groups of people are attempting to tell Marylanders what they can and cannot read and are threatening library staff for providing a diverse collection of materials. Our own Anne Arundel County has faced both direct and indirect attempts to censor materials available at the library.

By far, book bans target books on race or racism featuring characters of color, as well as books with LGBTQ+ characters. Ensuring access to a diverse range of books is crucial for the intellectual and emotional development of individuals, particularly young people. Books provide not only knowledge but also empathy and perspective. They help readers explore different experiences and ideas, fostering understanding and connection.

All people deserve to see themselves reflected in library books. Why does representation matter? According to the Trevor Project, LGBTQ youth who found their school or community to be LGBTQ-affirming reported **lower rates of attempting suicide**. Removing or restricting queer books in libraries and schools is like cutting a lifeline for queer youth.

Some argue that book bans protect children. Indeed, parents have the right to guide their children's reading, but they should not be making decisions for other people's kids. Books are tools for understanding complex issues and foster an important trait, empathy. Limiting people's access to books does not protect them from life's challenges, it merely shuts down their ability to truly understand themselves and the world around them. And it represents a real threat to our democracy.

Accordingly, Annapolis Pride respectfully requests a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 738.

SB 0738 Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Daniel Hopkins

Position: FAV

Daniel Hopkins
822 Thompson Creek Road
Stevensville, MD 21666

February 22 2024

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, Senator King, and members of the committee:

I am writing to support the SB 0738 Freedom to Read Act. This act requires libraries that receive funding from the State to have firm policies guiding materials collection, and clear procedures for re-consideration requests.

The Freedom to Read Act strongly reasserts the constitutional principle that library materials, services, and resources are essential for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all individuals served by the library. The selection of these materials, services, and resources is intended to be inclusive, representing the diversity of the community.

This legislation actively safeguards local control of the selection process, empowering libraries to operate within the defined scope set by their board and the state library.

While the majority of the public stand firmly against censorship, we have seen a national movement to constrain and censor library materials according to the standards of only a section of a community. There have been efforts to penalize or criminalize the crucial work conducted by library staff. Some of these challenges have reached Maryland. This proposed bill defends libraries and library staff from punitive actions for doing their work within the policies of their libraries.

The Freedom to Read Act protects library materials from intentional harm or restriction of access by individuals, acknowledging these items as communal property. Library materials, services, and resources are vital to successful schools and thriving communities. Please support the passage of this important legislation.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dan Hopkins

Daniel T Hopkins

SB0738 FAV Minus.pdf

Uploaded by: David Duba

Position: FAV

Maryland General Assembly
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Written Testimony of Bowie High Student Government Executive Board
Brianna Minus, Secretary

In SUPPORT of SB0738
“Freedom to Read Act”

February 23, 2024 9:00 am

Thank you Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of SB0738 The Freedom to Read Act.

My name is Brianna Minus and I am an 11th grader at Bowie High School in Prince George's County, Maryland. I am testifying on the Freedom to Read Act because, as a fellow teenager who loves to read, I don't want books being banned or not having access to read the books in which I have interest.

A couple of weeks ago, my English teacher made us read a text called “I Know Why the Caged Bird Cannot Read”. The text was about the author, Francine Prose, criticizing all of the books that talk about more difficult topics dealing with life such as racism, misogyny, sexual assault, and censorship. Prose did not want students to read these types of books such as “The Color Purple”, “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” and “Fahrenheit 451.” The text made me upset because trying to get students not to read certain books because of the content they may feature is censorship.

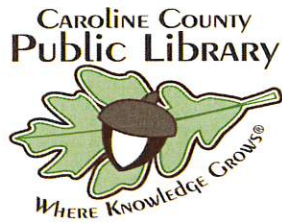
I wanted to share my story because I think the Freedom to Read Act is extremely important and should be passed. I have seen on the news and read about what is happening in Florida with the banning of books that explore sensitive issues. I do not want Maryland to end up like that. I want to keep reading expressive books like the ones Maya Angelou and Alice Parker have written because they not only inspire me but inspire others.

I would like to thank Senators King, Beidle, Benson, Brooks, Elfreth, Feldman, Ferguson, Gile, Guzzone, Hettleman, Jackson, Kagan, Kelly, Kramer, Lewis Young, McCray, Waldstreicher, A. Washington, M. Washington, and Zucker for sponsoring this bill. I think it is very important to kids, teenagers, adults, and everyone else who loves to read as much as me that the Freedom to Read Act gets passed.

SB738 letter of support_CaroCoPubLib_2-22-24.pdf

Uploaded by: Debby Bennett

Position: FAV



**Senate Education, Energy & Environmental Committee
SB738 – Freedom to Read Act
February 22, 2024
Support**

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

This letter is in support of SB738 Freedom to Read Act

I respectfully ask for your support of SB738 to establish principals for curating a responsible library collection, protect community collections from deliberate theft, protect libraries and library staff from being penalized for doing their work within the policies and procedures outlined by their organization, affirm constitutional librarianship, protect libraries as they continue to defend against unconstitutional censorship, and codify Maryland's values of access for all people.

Furthermore it sets a State standard for libraries that receive funding from the State and prohibits county boards of education and the governing bodies of libraries from retaliating against employees for acting in a manner consistent with the State standards for libraries.

Sincerely,

Debby Bennett
Executive Director

info@carolib.org • www.carolib.org

Central Library
100 Market Street
Denton, Maryland 21629
p 410.479.1343 f 410.479.1443

Federalsburg Branch
123 Morris Avenue
Federalsburg, Maryland 21632
p 410.754.8397 f 410.754.3058

North County Branch
101 Cedar Lane • P.O. Box 336
Greensboro, Maryland 21639
p 410.482.2173 f 410.482.2634

SB738 Testimony 2024.pdf

Uploaded by: Debi Jasen

Position: FAV

Senate Bill 738 - FAVORABLE
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Honorable Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee;

Please give Senate Bill 738, the Freedom to Read Act, a Favorable report.

Censorship is not just unAmerican, it's anti-American. We should all have the freedom to read books that interest us. That books we have access to through the library systems shouldn't be determined according to the political, religious, or other beliefs of any individual, or even majority, in a community. That is wrong and goes against the very values of liberty that this country was founded on.

Librarians have specific educations for the purpose of determining which books should be put on the shelves, according to various factors. In fact, the Maryland Library Association supports this bill. The American Library Association has also, for decades, supported the freedom to read and vehemently opposed censorship. The American Association of School Librarians has a large collection of anti-censorship links on its webpage for school librarians who are being forced to deal with book bans. And the Maryland State Education Association supports the Freedom to Read Act.

Why are some people against allowing librarians doing their jobs? That's an easy one. The groups who are the loudest in promoting censorship of library materials right now are those who have been outspoken against LGBTQ+ people and been opposed to the teaching of the history of racism in this country. Yes, some of them call their bigotry "religion," but so does the Asatru Folk Assembly. If your religion calls on you to reject, demonize, or erase people from public life or education, then it's a religion of bigotry. I don't share that religion. My children don't share that religion. My friends and their children don't share that religion. Removing books because they have LGBTQ+ characters or themes, because they teach about LGBTQ+ issues, or because they teach about experiences and realities of racism means forcing others who use those libraries to practice the religions of the censors. I'm a big fan of the 1st amendment, even memorizing it when I was 10 and first became outspoken against censorship. Those who would prevent others from accessing library materials would do away with it.

I hope you will show your patriotism, your appreciation of information, and your desire for an educated society by giving Senate Bill 738 a Favorable report. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Debi Jasen
Pasadena, MD

SB 738 - Freedom to Read Act.pdf

Uploaded by: Donna Edwards

Position: FAV



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

AFFILIATED WITH NATIONAL AFL-CIO

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President

Donna S. Edwards

Secretary-Treasurer

Gerald W. Jackson

SB 738 - Freedom to Read Act
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 23, 2024

SUPPORT

Donna S. Edwards
President
Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO

Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 738. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of Maryland's 300,000 union members, I offer the following comments because we must take the controversy over availability of reading materials very seriously.

SB 738 establishes statewide standards for public libraries, requiring that library materials and resources exist for all persons, prohibits excluding material because of the origin or background of the authors, and prohibits partisan removal of material. SB 738 then ties funding of the public libraries to meeting these prudent statewide standards. In practice, SB 738 indirectly prohibits libraries from banning material due to disagreements with the authors or partisan objections to the contents of the books.

Libraries and librarians have been under attack in the past few years. In 2022, there were 1,296 registered attempts to censor books at different library systems according to the American Library Association.¹ Some libraries have even faced bomb threats from members of the public objecting to the content of books they offer.² The New York Times reported that some librarians were even accused by members of the public of criminal activity, writing, "A complaint was made to the Clinton Township Police Department about obscene materials in a library book. The Hunterdon County Prosecutor's Office said none of the information it received indicated criminal conduct. In Granbury, Texas, a county constable opened an investigation about books available in a high school library after receiving a complaint."³ These book bans and attacks on libraries do not only damage the workers, the Public School Review argues, that "Shielding children from these crucial themes through practices such as book banning has far-reaching implications beyond limiting their literary exposure. It can cause a detrimental deficit in their ability to empathize with experiences outside their immediate

¹ Tracie D. Hall, "Attacks on Libraries Are Attacks on Democracy." Time. September 2023.

² Adora Namigadde, "Local librarians say unfounded bomb threats represent a deeper political, cultural divide." Chicago Sun Times. September 2023.

³ Elizabeth Harris, "With Rising Book Bans, Librarians Have Come Under Attack." New York Times. June 2023.

understanding, inhibit the development of their critical thinking skills, and impair their awareness and knowledge of intricate societal problems that require their engagement and responsiveness for societal progress and reform.”⁴

Librarians and public library systems are essential parts of our democratic system. They guarantee the free flow of information. If state money is to be used to support these public institutions, it is important that state tax dollars are not going to subsidize censorship and attacks on librarians.

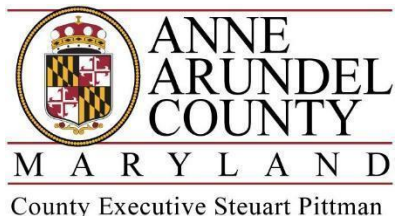
We urge a favorable report on SB 738.

⁴ Kennedy, “Understanding the Consequences of Banning Books in K-12 Education.” Public School Review. October 30, 2023.

Anne Arundel County _FAV_SB738.pdf

Uploaded by: Ethan Hunt

Position: FAV



February 22, 2024

Senate Bill 738

Freedom to Read Act

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

Anne Arundel County **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 738 – Freedom to Read Act. This Bill establishes a State standard for library operations to ensure that all public libraries follow uniform standards to ensure every Marylander has access to library materials, regardless of the author or creator’s background, origin, or opinions. This Bill will also protect our library employees and allow them to do their jobs without fear of retribution.

Libraries play an essential role in our community by offering a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment that provides residents with books, internet access, educational and cultural programs, and other essential services. Our residents go to libraries to learn new ideas, understand different perspectives, and explore their interests. However, these efforts will be undermined if libraries can exclude materials based on the background of their authorships or doctrinal disapproval. Libraries are centers that provide information and services for the enlightenment of all individuals. They themselves should not be the source of censorship.

Given the rise of politically motivated censorship, it is more imperative now that libraries are protected from extreme politics. It is the foundation of our democracy that people have the right to pursue their own interests, to learn new perspectives, and most importantly, to think and disagree freely. For all of these reasons, I respectfully request a **FAVORABLE** report on Senate Bill 738.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steuart Pittman".

Steuart Pittman
County Executive

2024_0223_SB0738_EzraTowne_Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Ezra Towne

Position: FAV

Ezra Towne

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Silver Spring, MD 20902

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Favorable Testimony on Bill SB0738: Freedom to Read Act

February 21, 2024

Chair Senator Brian J. Feldman, Vice-Chair Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, and esteemed members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

I write to you today as a transmasculine nonbinary adult invested in the well-being of transgender and nonbinary library users in the state of Maryland. I am also a facilitator of a trans-led peer support group in Montgomery County. **My testimony on this bill is favorable, and I urge you to move this bill promptly through committee with a favorable vote.**

SB0738 would establish state standards for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ (and other controversial) books in libraries that receive state funding. The bill also would alter some of the aspects of the currently existing state library committees to account for the additional work and funding to ensure that our libraries are as inclusive as possible - for all residents of Maryland.

I am currently 49 years old. If more resources had been available to me in state and local libraries, and in school libraries, I would have been much much younger than 42 when I realized that there was a word for someone like me: nonbinary - neither male nor female, but somewhere in between. I would have undergone physical transition to match my internal gender identity with what the world perceives about my gender in my twenties.

I would also have been a much happier teenager and young adult, rather than the depressed and suicidal person that I once was. If there had simply been any media at all that covered what trans and/or nonbinary gender identities were back then, I would have seen people like myself thriving as their authentic selves.

I applaud the Education, Energy, and the Environment committee for hearing this bill, considering its full impact, and working to move the bill onto the Senate floor via a favorable report.

Transgender and nonbinary Marylanders deserve to see themselves represented in the literature and other media at our libraries - just as much as any other person does. **I ask the committee for a favorable report on SB0738, the Freedom to Read Act, so that the bill moves promptly to the House of Delegates for a full vote.**

Sincerely,



Ezra Towne
District 18

SB 738 - Freedom to Read - ACLU Testimony (Feb 202

Uploaded by: Frank Patinella

Position: FAV



Testimony for the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

February 23, 2024

SB 738 - Freedom to Read Act

FAVORABLE

FRANK PATINELLA
SENIOR POLICY
ADVOCATE

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ANDREW FREEMAN
GENERAL COUNSEL

The ACLU of Maryland (ACLU) supports SB 738 - Freedom to Read Act, which would establish a set of standards that all state-funded libraries — including libraries in public schools — should follow. These standards will ensure that:

1. Libraries will provide access to materials, services, and resources for the interest, information, and enlightenment of the public.
2. Libraries will not remove or exclude books and educational materials in public libraries and schools based on the origin or views of the author or because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.
3. Librarians and media specialists are protected from being demoted, disciplined, or retaliated against for acting in a manner consistent with the state standards for libraries.

Nearly 3,500 books were banned nationwide during the 2022-2023 school year, which represents a 33% increase from the prior year.¹ Overwhelmingly, book bans have targeted books about people of color, race or racism, and LGBTQ+ themes. Around the country, punitive laws have passed in certain states, forcing school districts to restrict access to certain books.

The ACLU believes that libraries in the community and public schools play an essential role in upholding the principles and ideals of America's democracy. Libraries serve to ensure that adults and children have access to a wide swath of information from a variety of perspectives to foster knowledge and understanding. A core tenet of our democracy is the freedom to access information and discuss and debate ideas, including those that some may find uncomfortable or disagreeable.

¹ Meehan, Kasey et al. *Banned in the USA: The Mounting Pressure to Censor*. Pen America. <https://pen.org/report/book-bans-pressure-to-censor/>

Book bans are a form of censorship that violates people's First Amendment right to access information. Further, book bans that target people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals and communities are discriminatory. Barring access to certain perspectives of history and the lived experiences of those who have been marginalized is antithetical to America's guarantee of free speech. SB 738 will protect all Marylanders' access to information and prevent discrimination against materials pertaining to marginalized people and communities.

For the foregoing reasons, the ACLU requests a favorable vote on SB 738.

AMERICAN CIVIL
LIBERTIES UNION
FOUNDATION OF
MARYLAND

2.23.2024_LWVMD_SB738_Freedom to Read_support.pdf

Uploaded by: Gail Sunderman

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND the ENVIRONMENT

HB 737 – Freedom to Read Act

POSITION: Support

BY: Linda T. Kohn, President

Date: 23 February 2024

The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) is a nonpartisan organization that works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. At the 2020 LWVUS Convention, delegates voted to amend the LWVUS bylaws to include the League's commitment to its [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion \(DEI\) Policy](#) in Article II as one of the foundational policies of the organization alongside the Political Policy (also referred to as the [Nonpartisan Policy](#)). The LWVMD is committed to collaborating with lawmakers and educational stakeholders to protecting the integrity of our library system while respecting the values of inclusivity, diversity, and intellectual freedom. SB 738 is consistent with those values.

LWVMD strongly supports SB 738 – Freedom to Read Act - because it establishes standards that will protect libraries and librarians from efforts to censor or otherwise remove certain materials from library shelves. Lawmakers across the nation are proposing and passing legislation to ban books in libraries and schools, including in Maryland.¹ This bill will counter those effort to ban books by requiring that libraries, the regional resource center, and cooperative service program in Maryland adhere to State standards for libraries or lose state funding. Importantly, it will protect librarians from retaliatory acts for doing their job. Efforts to ban books also target the most vulnerable in our society.

Banning books is the antithesis of a free and open democracy and a violation of our first amendment rights. It should not be tolerated. This bill will push back against efforts to limit our access to books by ensuring that access to books, materials, and resources are not restricted and librarians are not subject to retaliation simply for doing their job. This bill is an important step in protecting those rights.

We urge a favorable report on SB 738.

¹ Figueroa, A. & Ford, W. J. (October 5, 2023). First amendment advocates fight growing number of book bans. *Maryland Matters*. <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2023/10/05/first-amendment-advocates-fight-growing-number-of-book-bans/>

SB 738 - EEE - SUPP - freedom to read - Feb 23.pdf

Uploaded by: Henry Bogdan

Position: FAV

February 22, 2024

Testimony on Senate Bill 738
Freedom to Read Act
Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

Position: Favorable

Maryland Nonprofits is a statewide association of almost 1800 nonprofit organizations and institutions. We urge you to support Senate Bill 738, to recognize and protect the critically important right of all Marylanders to access materials and resources expressing diverse views in public libraries regardless of their evoking ‘partisan or doctrinal’ controversy or opposition.

Senate Bill 738 adopts as standards for all libraries receiving state funds:

- (1) library materials, services, and resources exist and should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all persons the library serves;
- (2) a library should not exclude material from its catalogue because of the origin, background, or views of a person who created the material; and
- (3) (3) a library should not prohibit or remove material from its catalogue because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

The bill also provides specific protection for library personnel against any disciplinary or retaliatory action for adhering to these standards, and increases the penalty for any unlawful removal, detention, defacement or other damage to library materials or property.

Political or ideological censorship is anathema to the right of free expression protected in both the U.S. Constitution and the Maryland Declaration of Rights. Maryland Nonprofits is committed to supporting the values of equity, diversity and inclusion, and we strongly urge you to give Senate Bill 738 a favorable report.

SB 738 - Freedom to Read Act - Written Testimony 2

Uploaded by: Irene Padilla

Position: FAV



Maryland
State Library
Agency

BILL:	Senate Bill 738	DATE:	February 23, 2024
SUBJECT:	Freedom to Read Act	COMMITTEE:	Education, Energy and the Environment
SPEAKER:	Irene Padilla, State Librarian	POSITION:	Favorable

EXPLANATION

The Freedom to Read Act is critical to the future of Maryland’s libraries, communities and intellectual freedom.

The intent of the bill is for any public library, school library, resource center, or other library arrangement developed by the Maryland State Library Agency (MSLA) that receives funding from the State to adopt and follow a written policy consistent with state standards for libraries.

The bill establishes these state standards, along with principles for curating a responsible library collection. It also protects library collections from deliberate theft, protects libraries and library staff from being penalized for doing their work within the policies and procedures outlined by their organization, and codifies Maryland’s values of access for all people.

The Freedom to Read Act is necessary to protect Maryland’s public libraries from a growing number of book ban and censorship attempts.

In January 2024, MSLA conducted a statewide survey of Maryland’s public library systems to learn more about the prevalence of challenges to library collections over the past five years. Nineteen of the state’s 24 public library systems responded. While Maryland’s public libraries haven’t experienced as many censorship attempts as some other states, we are seeing a significant upward trend.

Survey respondents reported just six formal challenges to their collections in 2019. A formal challenge is an official process that includes a thorough review of the material being challenged and, ultimately, a decision on whether it will remain in the collection. By 2022, the number of formal challenges had increased to 20, a 233-percent increase. In 2023, 14 formal challenges were reported, a 133-percent increase over 2019.

Libraries also reported a significant increase in informal challenges. Informal challenges include phone calls, emails and in-person complaints. In 2019, respondents reported eight informal challenges across the state. In 2023, respondents reported 31 informal challenges, a 263-percent increase.

Materials on topics related to LGBTQIA+ and gender identity were challenged most frequently, along with materials on race/critical race theory.

The number of people submitting challenges is growing. Thirty-eight individuals challenged public library materials in Maryland in 2023, up from 11 individuals in 2019. That represents a 245-percent increase.

Maryland's public school libraries have been hit especially hard by these censorship attempts. In a September 2023 survey conducted by the Maryland Association of School Librarians (MASL), 68 percent of respondents reported book challenges in their school districts over a two-year period beginning in the fall of 2021.

Some librarians have started self-censoring when selecting materials for library collections. The MASL survey found that 53 percent of public school librarians reported not purchasing books that they were afraid would be "controversial." Fifty-seven percent reported that book challenges have made their job more difficult and 42 percent said book challenges have had a negative impact on their personal lives and/or interactions in their communities.

With House Bill 785, it is the goal of the State that each library is operated in a manner that recognizes the following standards:

- (1) Library materials, services, and resources exist and should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all persons the library serves;
- (2) a library should not exclude material from its catalog because of the origin, background, or views of a person who created the material;
- (3) a library should not prohibit or remove material from its catalog because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval; and
- (4) outlines actions in response to those who knowingly damage, steal, destroy or withhold the property of a library.

The bill prohibits county boards of education and the governing bodies of libraries from retaliating against employees for acting in a manner consistent with the state standards for libraries. An employee may not be dismissed, suspended, disciplined, demoted, reassigned, transferred, or otherwise retaliated against for acting in a manner consistent with the adopted written policy.

The state library board shall develop policies for the operation of libraries that align with the state standards for libraries and ensure that each library that receives state funds is operated in a manner consistent with these standards. Receipt of funding under this bill is contingent on a public library, resource center, or cooperative service program adopting a written policy that is consistent with the state standards for libraries. The state librarian shall authorize the state comptroller to withhold state funds from a library, resource center, or cooperative service program that does not adopt a written policy that is consistent with the state standards for libraries.

The bill will require MSLA to maintain accurate records regarding any policies or procedures developed by public libraries to be in compliance with state law. This will create a minimal impact on Agency work, as protocols are in place to track other compliance documents.

MSLA fully supports the passage of this bill.

Senate Testimony Freedom to Read.pdf

Uploaded by: Jacob Gerding

Position: FAV

SB738

FAV

My name is Jacob Gerding, and I am on the executive board of the Maryland Association of School Librarians. I am also an elementary school librarian in Charles County. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB785/SB738 also known as the Freedom to Read bill. This bill is an important step in the ongoing fight against censorship nationally in both public and school libraries. The Freedom to Read Act provides protection for school librarians to perform their essential work without fear of harassment or retribution, and ultimately, allows our libraries to be the hub of a vibrant inclusive learning environment.

In the last two years, we have watched as a politically motivated movement has repeatedly attempted, sometimes successfully, to remove books from the shelves of school libraries. School librarians never thought this would happen, until it did. Efforts at censoring and restricting access to a high-quality school library collection prevent school librarians from fulfilling a key duty – curating a robust, up-to-date collection that meets the needs of our students and the community. We take our collection development responsibilities seriously.

A recent survey of Maryland librarians conducted by the Maryland Association of School Librarians on book challenges and censorship in their districts, revealed that book challenges have become a statewide epidemic. And although we take our commitment of selecting and evaluating titles for our school library collections seriously, many librarians are fearful of job security and retribution for having diverse collections, and soft censorship is taking place. Soft censorship is just as detrimental to the intellectual freedom of the school community as is book banning and unconstitutional censorship. Those that ban and censor information have never been on the right side of history.

The Maryland Association of School Librarians feels strongly that this legislation would: defend libraries and library staff from punitive actions for doing their jobs and adhering to the policies and procedures of their library and will uphold and ensure school boards also adhere to the professional policies of selection, evaluation, and review of library materials.

It is said that books in a school library collection should reflect the student community, like a mirror; at the same time, it should be a window through which students may learn about the wide and diverse world. Parents are the first teachers of their children and may decide what they want their children to experience in their reading lives; but no one person or group should be able to make such a personal decision for other people's children as it makes us all a little less free. The Freedom to Read Act defends the first amendment right of every student and Marylander to access a library collection that is culturally responsive and inclusive of all individuals served by the library, as well as the world in which we live.

On behalf of school librarians, students, and families across Maryland, thank you for standing up for our first amendment rights.

Jacob E. Gerding, IV

Maryland Association of School Librarians Delegate to the American Association of School Librarians

Freedom to Read Act

Uploaded by: Jacquelyn Slade

Position: FAV

Personal Testimony – SB 738 – Freedom to Read Act

SB 738 would address the onslaught of book bans that has taken over the US.

Most people think that these battles are only happening in places like Florida or Texas, but they are taking place and have been won right in my hometown in Carroll County, Maryland.

In Carroll County, the school board tends to cater to interest groups such as Moms for Liberty, rather than students or teachers. Statements accusing LGBTQ+ people of “grooming children” have occurred right in front of my eyes.

However, in these same meetings, the opinions of young people and many teachers have been utterly disregarded and ignored, while words like “diversity” and “inclusion” become trigger words.

We cannot let groups endorsing hate and discrimination shape what books are available in our schools and libraries. When the same groups and people endorsing the banning of pride flags in Carroll County Public Schools (which was passed by the Board of Education) endorse book banning, their motives are clear.

The form to request that a book be removed from a Carroll County Library is simple and doesn't even require that you have read the book. This allows people to request that a book be banned without even understanding its basic plot.

In the age of information, the internet is a constant source of information – truths and lies, facts and opinions, prejudice and acceptance. However, books allow one to step into someone's shoes and think critically.

Access to books of diverse perspectives has personally shaped my educational journey, and in my personal opinion, leads to less discrimination and hatred of those who are considered “different from the norm” societally.

Therefore, I urge a favorable report on SB 738.

Jacquelyn P. Slade
Carroll County Resident and Johns Hopkins University Student

HB785_ SB738 Freedom to Read Act.pdf

Uploaded by: Jaden Farris

Position: FAV

BILL: House Bill 785 / Senate Bill 738 Freedom to Read Act

DATE: February 7th, 2024

POSITION: FAVORABLE

COMMITTEE: Ways and Means Committee

CONTACT: Jaden Farris | chapter@md.glsen.org

I am submitting this testimony **in FAVOR of HB785 / SB738 Freedom to Read Act** on behalf of GLSEN Maryland, the statewide chapter of GLSEN National, a nonprofit organization centered on creating and sustaining inclusive K-12 education for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) students.

Since 2021, requests to remove books from schools and libraries experienced an enormous surge. Instead of the occasional complaint from a concerned parent, librarians have been facing coordinated challenges to long lists of titles, submitted by organized political groups such as Moms for Liberty. According to research by PEN America (2023), **more than 60% of challenged titles have LGBTQ+ themes, are on topics of race, or both.**

This bill is necessary because **Maryland has not escaped these attempts:** this past school year, Carroll County removed over 50 books, many with LGBTQ+ themes, from shelves. Cecil County put many LGBTQ+ themed books in a restricted “older teen” section. Worcester and Wicomico County are considering similar policies. And this is just the tip of the iceberg.

The Freedom to Read Act would help retain LGBTQ+ themed and other books on school shelves by setting state standards for school library collections. **All children in Maryland public schools deserve to see themselves and their families represented in books in their school libraries, and this includes LGBTQ+ students.**

Offering inclusive reading material improves education outcomes. Children vary in their interests and motivations to read, and diversity in reading materials increases the chances that students will be engaged readers. Children exposed to diverse perspectives and the experiences of others develop stronger critical thinking and reasoning skills, improved empathy, increased ability to perspective-take, and stronger interpersonal skills—all vital educational outcomes for today’s learners.

Offering inclusive reading material in Maryland schools **improves school climate, which benefits all youth.** It is not just LGBTQ+ youth who are the target of anti-LGBTQ+ bullying; heterosexual, cisgender students can also be called anti-gay slurs, teased for being too effeminate or masculine, etc. (Fisher et al., 2012; McCarty-Caplan, 2013). Because access to diverse reading materials reduces stigma and marginalization of LGBTQ+ youth, it leads to improved school climates for *everyone*. LGBTQ+ students whose schools had inclusive curricula also report feeling safer and more accepted (GLSEN, 2019). Similar patterns have been found for Black LGBTQ+ youth (GLSEN, 2020); further, Black LGBTQ+ youth who attend schools with LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum also felt their race or ethnicity was more supported at school (GLSEN, 2020).

It is for these reasons that GLSEN Maryland is in support of **HB785 / SB378 the Freedom to Read Act** and we seek a **FAVORABLE** vote in committee.

SB 738 testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: James Kelly

Position: FAV



FREDERICK
COUNTY
**PUBLIC
LIBRARIES**

**Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
SB 738 Freedom to Read Act
February 21, 2024**

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Committee Members,

I am writing to ask for your favorable support of **SB 738 - Freedom To Read Act**.

This important bill would do several important things.

It establishes State standards for libraries. It mandates that all libraries craft comprehensive policies covering collection development in compliance with established standards as a condition of State funding support. It protects library workers who are acting in a manner consistent with State standards from retaliation by Boards of Education or governing bodies of libraries.

Finally, this bill enshrines Maryland's unwavering commitment to provide open access to inclusive library collections that represent the diversity of the communities that we serve.

Your committee's support of this bill will protect every Marylander's Freedom to Read. We ask that you favorably recommend SB 738 for passage. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,
James Kelly, Director, Frederick County Public Libraries

Board of Trustees

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SB738.pdf

Uploaded by: Jamie Watson

Position: FAV



**SB 738 Support
Freedom to Read Act
Senate of Maryland Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the Committee:

My name is Jamie Watson, and I am the Collection Development manager at Baltimore County Public Library. I am here today to speak in favor of SB738.

I have nearly 30 years of public library experience in Ohio and Maryland, including at Enoch Pratt Free Library, Harford County Public Library and currently Baltimore County. At each of these institutions, a collection development policy, such as is required in SB738, was a backbone of the library's selection process. Each systems administration and their library board has the ability to create their own policy that meets the needs and interests of their community.

Collection development librarians follow these policies every day. We must know about publishing trends, about community demographics, about childhood and teen development. We curate a library collection that serves all of our residents and each of these residents have the opportunity to decide which library books are for them and they are the only ones who can decide that. Personally, I don't care for sad animal books or super sweet romance novels. That is my choice, but I purchase these books for our library collection. Each individual should have this ability to determine what to read and what to leave on the shelf for others, and SB738 assures that the expertise of librarians is honored, and the interest of the public to choose their reading material is also honored.

Sincerely,

Jamie Watson
Collection Development Manager

Support Letter SB 0738 - Freedom to Read Act_Queen

Uploaded by: Janet Salazar

Position: FAV

**Education, Energy, and the Environment
SB 0738 Freedom to Read Act - Favorable
February 23, 2024**

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, Senator King, and members of the committee,

The Queen Anne's County Library supports SB 0738 Freedom to Read Act which will establish State standards for libraries that receive funding from the State. This act mandates all libraries to craft comprehensive policies covering collection selection, maintenance, and procedures for reconsideration requests, emphasizing strict adherence to those policies.

The Freedom to Read Act strongly reasserts the constitutional principle that library materials, services, and resources are essential for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all individuals served by the library. The selection of these materials, services, and resources is intended to be inclusive, representing the diversity of the community. This legislation actively safeguards local control of the selection process, empowering libraries to operate within the defined scope set by their board and the state library.

While the majority of the public stand firmly against censorship, we have seen a national movement to constrain and censor library materials according to the standards of only a section of a community. There have been efforts to penalize or criminalize the crucial work conducted by library staff. Some of these challenges have reached Maryland. This proposed bill defends libraries and library staff from punitive actions for doing their work within the policies of their libraries.

The Freedom to Read Act protects library materials from intentional harm or restriction of access by individuals, acknowledging these items as communal property. Library materials, services, and resources are vital to successful schools and thriving communities. Queen Anne's County Library supports the passage of this important legislation.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

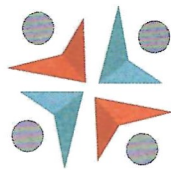
Sincerely,

Janet Salazar
Director
Queen Anne's County Library

SB783_Support_Schutte.pdf

Uploaded by: Jenny Bakos

Position: FAV



WASHINGTON COUNTY
FREE LIBRARY

Where People & Possibilities Meet

February 23, 2024

Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chairman
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice Chairman Kagan and Committee Members,

As the Chairman of the Washington County Free Library Board of Trustees, I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for the **Freedom to Read Act (SB738)** currently under consideration. I believe that this bill represents a crucial step in safeguarding the fundamental principles of intellectual freedom and access to information for all citizens.

The Freedom to Read Act establishes essential State standards for libraries that receive funding from the State of Maryland. The bill's commitment to ensuring that library materials, services, and resources are provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all individuals we serve is to be commended. By emphasizing that libraries should not exclude or remove materials based on the origin, background, or views of their creators, the bill upholds the core principles of intellectual freedom and diversity of thought.

The Freedom to Read Act also prohibits retaliatory actions against library employees who act in accordance with the State standards, ensuring that staff members can fulfill their professional duties without fear of reprisal. Additionally, the bill outlines necessary actions to address instances of vandalism, theft, or destruction of library property, providing essential protections for our community collections.

It is essential to highlight what this bill does and does not entail:

What this bill does:

- Establishes principles for curating a responsible library collection
- Protects community collections from deliberate theft
- Safeguards libraries and library staff from unwarranted penalization for adhering to organizational policies and procedures
- Codifies Maryland's values of access for all people

What this bill does not do:

- Dictate specific topics or titles that must be included in library collections
- Permit obscene or pornographic material in library collections
- Mandate individuals to borrow items they find objectionable
- Commit Maryland to a standard or set of principles outlined by external organizations such as the American Library Association

In conclusion, the Freedom to Read Act is a vital piece of legislation that aligns with the Washington County Free Library's commitment to providing equitable access to information and protecting the principles of intellectual freedom. I urge you to support this bill and ensure its passage for the benefit of our communities and the continued vitality of our public libraries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Schutte', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stephen Schutte
Chairman, Board of Trustees
Washington County Free Library and Western Maryland Regional Library

Favorable Testimony SB0738 - 2.23.2024.pdf

Uploaded by: Jeremy Browning

Position: FAV



**Maryland Commission
on LGBTQIA+ Affairs**

**TESTIMONY OF JEREMY BROWNING
DIRECTOR, MARYLAND COMMISSION ON LGBTQIA+ AFFAIRS
FAVORABLE STATEMENT ON SB0738
FREEDOM TO READ ACT**

February 23, 2024

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

The Hon. Brian J. Feldman, Chair
The Hon. Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, my name is Jeremy Browning(he/him), and I am the Director of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs. The Commission was created by the 2021 Maryland General Assembly, and later altered in 2023, to assess challenges facing our LGBTQIA+ communities, establish best practices and recommendations for LGBTQIA+ inclusion, and provide testimony to legislative and administrative bodies.

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs is in strong support of Senate Bill 738, the Freedom to Read Act. Preventing book bans is a top priority for the Commission, and this legislation is vital in ensuring that libraries across Maryland uphold the principles of inclusivity, diversity, and intellectual freedom.

The Commission is deeply concerned about the recent wave of book bans targeting materials with LGBTQIA+ content or characters. Such censorship not only restricts access to important literary works, but seeks to erase LGBTQIA+ individuals and families from public life, perpetuating discrimination and marginalization.

The Commission has extensively researched and analyzed the experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth in our state's education system. Reports such as the 2021 GLSEN National School Climate Survey and the GLSEN 2021 Maryland State Snapshot reveal distressing data regarding the safety and well-being of LGBTQIA+ students in Maryland's schools.

These reports consistently demonstrate that Maryland's K-12 schools are frequently unsafe and hostile environments for LGBTQIA+ students. They experience alarming rates of bullying, harassment, assault, and discrimination from multiple sources, including peers, educators, administrators, and even family members. The consequences of this hostility are severe, leading to lower academic achievement, diminished mental health, and increased risk of suicidal ideation and behavior among LGBTQIA+ youth.

Moreover, the presence of anti-LGBTQIA+ groups in Maryland and across the nation further exacerbates these challenges, spreading misinformation and advocating for harmful policies that endanger the well-being of LGBTQIA+ youth. In this context, Senate Bill 738 safeguards our libraries by establishing State standards, which emphasize the importance of providing materials, services, and resources for the interest, information and enlightenment of all individuals. Public libraries should reflect the communities they serve and not exclude materials because of the origin, background, or views of the creator, or partisan or religious beliefs.

By incorporating these standards into library operations and policies, we can ensure that libraries remain inclusive spaces where diverse voices are celebrated and respected. Additionally, the provision to protect librarians for upholding these standards is crucial in preventing county boards of education and governing bodies from retaliating against library employees.

For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs strongly urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 738.

REFERENCES:

GLSEN. (2023). School Climate for LGBTQ+ Students in Maryland (2021 State Snapshot: Maryland). New York: GLSEN.

GLSEN. (2022). The 2021 National School Climate Survey (Executive Summary). New York: GLSEN.

SB 738, FAV, FCG, OCE JF, LS24.pdf

Uploaded by: Jessica Fitzwater

Position: FAV



FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Jessica Fitzwater
County Executive

SB 738 – Freedom to Read Act

DATE: February 23, 2024
COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
POSITION: Favorable
FROM: The Office of Frederick County Executive Jessica Fitzwater

As the County Executive of Frederick County, I urge the committee to give SB 738 – Freedom to Read Act a favorable report.

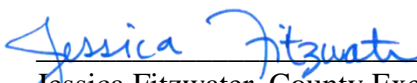
This bill will establish State standards for libraries, including prohibiting the removal of library materials, books and other resources based on an author or creator’s background, origin, or opinions or based on “partisan or doctrinal disapproval” of the contents. The bill will also protect librarians from losing employment for following such standards.

Nationally, we are seeing efforts to remove books from schools and libraries because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval. Oftentimes, these materials are simply sharing stories about families and characters of all walks of life – stories that should be available to our communities. According to the American Library Association (ALA), attempts to censor library materials increased by 20% from 2022 to 2023. Most of the challenges were to books written by or about a person of color or a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. When attacks on books such as these prevail, we not only limit the ability of our community to understand and learn about the world around them, but we also signal to people of color and LGBTQIA+ individuals that their humanity and experiences are unimportant or shameful.

As a 17-year educator and a mother to two avid readers, I know the importance of having access to books and library materials that tell all kinds of stories from broad, diverse perspectives.

SB 738 is crucial to protecting our librarians and the books within our libraries regardless of their subject matter. This bill aims to do so by tying library funding to following the established State standards of protecting all library content. By creating a penalty for violating one’s right to read, it is our hope that we can protect our right to library materials and the wellbeing of our librarians.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 738. I urge you to advance this bill with a favorable report.



Jessica Fitzwater, County Executive
Frederick County, MD

BaltimoreCounty_FAV_SB0738.pdf

Uploaded by: John Olszewski

Position: FAV

JOHN A. OLSZEWSKI, JR.
County Executive



JENNIFER AIOSA
Director of Government Affairs

AMANDA KONTZ CARR
Legislative Officer

WILLIAM J. THORNE
Legislative Associate

BILL NO.: **SB 738**

TITLE: Freedom to Read Act

SPONSOR: Senator King

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

DATE: February 23, 2024

Baltimore County **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 738 – Freedom to Read Act. This legislation protects the right to read for all Marylanders. Specifically, SB 738 spells out professional standards that all libraries abide by, it puts fiscal penalties in place for libraries who do not follow these standards, and it protects librarians from retaliation, loss of employment or punishment when they are acting in a manner consistent with these standards. Furthermore, it puts a penalty in place for customers who deliberately check out books and hold on to them for the express purpose of keeping them out of the hands of others, a form of censorship.

An alarming trend of book banning in public and school libraries has been taking place across the Country. Carroll County has, for example, restricted access to books deemed “sexually explicit” in its school libraries. The data shows that book banning has reached unprecedented levels in recent years. Book banning denies library users and reader access to books that foster learning and critical thinking, and is fundamentally undemocratic. Libraries exist to provide access to materials that reflect broad perspectives and to serve diverse audiences. It is not acceptable for any one person or group to deny access to literature for everyone else. Banning books in our public libraries is regressive and in our democratic society we must move towards including, not excluding, diverse perspectives.

Accordingly, Baltimore County urges a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 738 from the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee. For more information, please contact Jenn Aiosa, Director of Government Affairs at jaiosa@baltimorecountymd.gov.

SB-738-Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: John Taube

Position: FAV



Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Senate Bill 738

Freedom to Read Act

February 23, 2024

Favorable

Dear Chairperson Feldman and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Allegany County Library System and the citizens we serve, I am writing in favor of **SB 738, Freedom to Read Act**. The Freedom to Read bill reaffirms the constitutional principle that library materials, services, and resources exist and should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment for all persons the library serves.

We have seen a national movement to constrain and censor library materials according to the standards of a small section of a community. There have also been efforts to penalize or criminalize the work carried out by library staff. The Freedom to Read Act reasserts the constitutional principle that library materials, services, and resources are essential for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all individuals served by the library. This legislation safeguards local control of the selection process, empowering libraries to operate within the defined scope set by their board.

The Act provides the framework for libraries and empowers them to develop collections to meet the unique needs of their communities without imposing specific title or topic mandates. Further, it mandates that all libraries craft comprehensive policies covering materials selection, maintenance, and procedures for reconsideration requests and emphasizes strict adherence to those policies. In addition, SB 738 defends library staff from punitive actions for doing their work within the policies of their library as well as protecting library materials from intentional harm or restriction of access by individuals, acknowledging these items as communal property.

By reaffirming the library's role for our communities, the Freedom to Read bill allows the Allegany County Library System to continue the great work we have been doing to improve and enrich the lives of our residents.

Thank you for your continued support of the great work of public libraries across Maryland and we ask that you favorably recommend SB 738 for passage.

Sincerely,
John E. Taube,
Executive Director

Lyons testimony Freedom to Read.pdf

Uploaded by: Kathleen Lyons

Position: FAV

Kathleen Lyons
212 Brickhouse Dr.
Queenstown, MD 21658

Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
SB0738 – Freedom to Read Act- Favorable
February 22, 2024

February 22, 2024

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vicechair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to support the SB 0738 Freedom to Read Act to establish state standards for libraries that receive funding from the State. This act mandates all libraries to enact comprehensive policies covering collection selection, maintenance, and re-consideration requests. The act emphasizes strict adherence to those policies.

This legislation is sorely needed. We have seen a national movement come to our state and attempt to limit access to books and other library materials. We must ensure that we have comprehensive policies in place in all our libraries, and we must protect our library staff from being penalized for doing their jobs.

This legislation mandates that all libraries craft comprehensive policies covering collection selection, maintenance, and procedure reconsideration requests, emphasizing strict adherence to those adherence.

The Freedom to Read Act strongly reasserts the constitutional principle that library materials, services, and resources are essential for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all individuals served by the library. The Act strongly safeguards local control of the selection process, empowering libraries to operate within the defined scope set by their board and the state library.

The overwhelming majority of the public stand firmly against censorship. Some 75 percent oppose book banning. Please don't let a vocal minority dictate what the rest of us can read.

Your support for the Freedom to Read Act is vital for our democracy. .

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,
S/ Kathleen Lyons
Kathleen Lyons
Vice President, Board of Trustees, Queen Anne's County Free Library

SB738 - Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Kenzie Funk

Position: FAV



**Testimony in SUPPORT of
Senate Bill 738: Freedom to Read Act**

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Position: Favorable

February 23, 2024

Strong Schools Maryland envisions a future in which Maryland leads the nation in high-quality, equitable education practices and policies. An important component of a world class education are library services that promote the free dissemination of information and the inclusion/representation of the student body they serve. Librarians and media specialists are given both guidelines and training to help curate a collection of books and other forms of media. School librarians around Maryland often prioritize a collection of books that reflect the wide array of backgrounds of the children all around Maryland.¹

Senate Bill 738 simply protects these trained professionals from being dismissed, suspended, or unfairly disciplined for acting in accordance with their educational background, professional experience, and positional duty. Furthermore, the proposed piece of legislation explicitly prohibits the exclusion of materials due to the background, views, or origin of the person that created said material or the partisan/doctrinal disapproval of the content. Finally, the bill assures that libraries that are sustained through public funding must adopt a written policy consistent with this proposed legislation.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future envisions a system where public school administrators' and teachers' intents and informed decisions are not consistently questioned and attacked. The passage of this bill would indicate to the public that Maryland trusts and respects those who work within the public school system.

Not only would passing Senate Bill 738 exemplify Maryland's trust in their public school professionals, protecting the responsibility of librarians and the freedom of the information included within school libraries has tangible benefits for both staff and their students. In a national study completed by First Book and published in 2023, research indicated that an overwhelming majority of educators, 87%, agree that banning specific books within school libraries is never justifiable; a majority of educators also believe that the conversation surrounding government oversight of the content in public school libraries negatively impacts teaching and the school's climate.² Furthermore, Maryland students directly benefit from protecting the duties of the school librarian as students from marginalized communities, such

¹ [Maryland Association of School Librarians](#)

² [Educator Insights on the Conversation Around Banned Books](#)

³ Grace Pickering (2023) "Harmful to Minors": How Book Bans Hurt Adolescent Development, The Serials Librarian, 84:1-4, 32-45, DOI: [10.1080/0361526X.2023.2245843](https://doi.org/10.1080/0361526X.2023.2245843)

as a our Black and Brown children and LGBTQ+ youth, can see themselves and their stories in their own school library.³

Protecting the duties of this position, those who uphold values of inclusion and representation, and the free flow of information, advances the General Assembly's promise of a World Class Education for all students in Maryland.

For these reasons, we strongly urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 738.

For more information, contact Kenzie Funk at kenzie@strongschoolsmaryland.org

SB738 2024 Leg.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Lindsay Ward

Position: FAV

Support: SB 738 Freedom to Read Act

2/18/2024

Maryland Senate
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair, Vice-Chair, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the pediatric nurse practitioners (PNPs) and fellow pediatric-focused advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) of the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP) Chesapeake Chapter, I am writing to express our **Support for SB 738 Freedom to Read Act**.

We support establishing state-wide standards for public libraries, guided by content experts in librarian science and pedagogy. As experts in pediatrics and advocates for the health of children, we support the protection of minors from exposure to sexually explicit materials, however, we are seeing this being used as a dog whistle to enforce censoring materials representing marginalized groups.

Specifically, there is no research showing that reading books that discuss sex acts correlates with an increased risk of harm, earlier sexual practice, or risk of being a victim of sexual assault. The opposite can be true - these items can broaden perspectives, make youth more aware of risk, and become a source of strength to encourage children that they are not alone.

It is our position that this bill will directly help the students and faculty within Carroll County Public Schools, which has made national news with a book ban of nearly 60 books. This includes classics such as *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Kite Runner*, *Water For Elephants*, and *The Bluest Eye* while refusing to remove the Bible. Despite a selected book review committee comprised of honors students and educators who, following a full examination of certain books, recommended that many removed books should be allowed, the superintendent overrode this decision and further enforced the ban. Although it was not upheld, the book *All Are Welcome* was temporarily removed from some Pre-K/K classes in CCPS because of parental complaints of portraying same-sex parents, claiming this was also inappropriate. Within CCPS, a policy was also created that would allow for retaliation against librarians and educators for purchasing books that others find inappropriate. Allowing those of a certain religion or political viewpoint to determine which books are "sexually explicit" despite a full literature review as well as recommendations from librarians and other educators is a gross attack on the public school system, students, and educators.

It is important to note that this book ban follows a ban on pride flags passed in June 2022 and the resultant selection of a biased health curriculum review committee which removed many LGBTQIA+ topics from the required health education curriculum. These signs of escalation will not be stopped unless state law supercedes. Sitting CCPS school board members have publicly stated that "children do not need to be exposed to these alternative lifestyles" when referring to same-sex families and

repeatedly speak at large meetings against “dangerous gender ideologies” when referring to trans students. An October 2023 article found that 12% of the books banned in CCPS are written by non-binary authors and 45% include LGBTQIA+ characters, a statistically impossible find if at random.

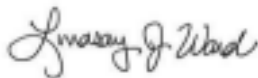
As you are likely aware, suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for children aged 10 to 17, and LGBTQIA+ children are at the highest risk, yet studies have shown that simple means of inclusion can decrease suicide rates. Continuing to allow the disproportionate attacks on the public-school system’s minority groups, limiting the safe expression of curious teenagers via literature, and persecuting educators will only cause harm to the children in Maryland. We trust the qualified educators to use their professional judgement in determining the appropriateness of literature. We also encourage parents who do not feel certain topics are appropriate to be involved with their child’s education and address those concerns directly within their family, while not interfering with others’ parental rights.

For these reasons the Maryland Chesapeake Chapter of NAPNAP extends their **Support for SB 738 Freedom to Read Act**. The pediatric advanced practice nurses of your state are grateful to you for your attention to these crucial issues. The members of Chesapeake Chapter of the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners memberships includes over 200 primary and acute care pediatric nurse practitioners who are committed to improving the health of and advocating for Maryland’s pediatric patients. If we can be of any further assistance, or if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Lindsay J. Ward, the Chesapeake Chapter President at 410-507-3642, or MDChesNAPNAPLeg@outlook.com.

Sincerely,



Jessica D. Murphy DNP CPNP-AC CPHON CNE
Certified Pediatric Acute Care Nurse Practitioner - Pediatric Oncology/BMT
PNP-AC Content Faculty Lead & Instructor for the Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing
NAPNAP Legislative Committee Co-Chair



Lindsay J. Ward MSN CRNP RN IBCLC
Certified Registered Nurse Practitioner- Pediatric Primary Care
International Board-Certified Lactation Consultant
NAPNAP Chesapeake Chapter President

Evgenia Ogordova

Evgenia Ogordova DNP CRNP
Certified Registered Nurse Practitioner- Pediatric Primary Care
NAPNAP Chesapeake Chapter Legislative Chair

SB0738 Freedom to Read Act.pdf

Uploaded by: Lindsey Baker

Position: FAV



February 22, 2024

Written Testimony IN FAVOR SB0738

Dear Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

I am writing to you in support of SB0738, also known as the Freedom to Read Act. This bill reaffirms the constitutional principle that library materials, services, and resources exist and should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all persons the library serves while protecting local control of that process, allowing libraries to thrive within the scope outlined by their board and the state library.

Maryland's libraries have long been recognized as national leaders in developing successful, high-quality services and collections. One of the practices that has long been at the foundation of that success is the ability of each library to provide for its community the materials needed to meet the needs of the people in that region. While providing a framework for how a library should serve, SB0738 protects the unique quality of each library and recognizes the quality professionalism of library staff.

The Freedom to Read Act charges governing bodies, such as library and school boards, to compose and adopt a written policy on library materials and to abide by that policy. The use of written operational policies is a long recognized practice, foundational to any well run public entity and often required by law. By setting general standards and requiring a policy without dictating the specific terms of that policy, The General Assembly demonstrates its ability to govern without mandating specific topics or titles which libraries must hold in the collection, allowing library professionals to do the job for which they are trained.

I urge your support of SB0738, which not only provides a well outlined charge for what libraries should do and recognizes the skills of professional librarians and governing boards to work within that charge, allowing them to provide quality library services to their unique communities. This legislation will allow each library to successfully serve the needs of everyone in their community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lindsay Baker".

Chief Executive Officer
(410) 699-3130
lbaker@mdhumanities.org

SB 738 Freedom to Read Act Written Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Lloyd Jansen

Position: FAV

Ways and Means Committee

SB 738 Freedom to Read Act

February 23, 2024

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Committee Members:

As a Maryland resident, I am writing to ask your favorable support for **SB 738 Freedom to Read Act**. This bill is crucial to preserving the freedom for students and library users to access information without interference from a vocal minority who wish to censor books because their ideologies do not agree with the subject matter of some library materials. The bill will do the following:

- Establish standards for the purchase of library materials
- Protects library materials from deliberate theft
- Protects library staff from retribution for simply doing their jobs as spelled out in the state standards and their library's policies and procedures
- Protects libraries that defend against unconstitutional attempts to censor collections and ban books

Despite the hyperbolic cries of censors who want to neuter library collections to fit their own narrow views of what they define as "age appropriate", libraries do not collect obscene materials. This is a legal term, defined by the Supreme Court in the Miller case (1973), and SB 738 does not allow obscene or pornographic materials to be purchased for library collections. Nor does the bill dictate topics or titles that must be purchased by libraries, or force people to check out materials they find objectionable. Finally, SB 738 does not establish standards or principles dictated by groups or organizations outside of Maryland.

While opponents of the bill may argue that the use of the term "book banning" for what the vocal minority are trying to achieve is inaccurate, this definition of the term from the Free Speech Center at Middle Tennessee State University succinctly sums up exactly what groups like Moms for Liberty, the Pacific Justice Institute, and individuals who agree with the stances of those groups are trying to do: "Book banning, a form of censorship, occurs when private individuals, government officials, or organizations remove books from libraries, school reading lists, or bookstore shelves because they object to their content, ideas, or themes."

SB 738 simply codifies into law a requirement that libraries purchase materials that serve a diverse user base. This bill recognizes that it is imperative for ALL library users in the state of Maryland to be able to find materials that interest them, and that libraries contain materials in which they can see themselves and learn about other people and ideas.

Unfortunately, the past few years has seen an explosion of efforts across the country by organized groups and individuals who want to ban books from school and public libraries simply because the books contain issues and characters dealing with the LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities. In fact, of the top thirteen books to be challenged and banned in 2022 according to the American Library Association Office for Intellectual Freedom, seven of them have an LGBTQ+ theme or characters. The argument that censors are not specifically targeting the LGBTQ+ community is simply false. As leaders in the state of Maryland, I urge you to proactively defend the public's first amendment right to access information by recommending SB 738 for passage.

Respectfully,

Lloyd M. Jansen

Freedom to Read Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Maria Smith

Position: FAV

I am submitting **favorable testimony for SB0738**. My name is Maria Smith and I am a resident of Carroll County and parent of two school-aged children.

Carroll County Public Schools (CCPS) Media Specialists are under unnecessary pressure to conform to a conservative agenda put forth by the majority of the CCPS Board of Education (BOE) members as well as local parent groups like Moms for Liberty.

In 2023, Moms for Liberty members initiated reconsideration requests for over 60 books. Due to this unprecedented volume of requests being submitted at once, the Superintendent opted to remove all of the books until they could be reviewed by the Reconsideration Committee. At the rate of approximately 5 books being reviewed each month, this process will take a full calendar year to complete. To date, three books have been permanently removed (banned) from CCPS after going through the reconsideration process. A large portion of the challenged books are written by queer authors or contain LGBTQ characters and/or themes. While certain BOE members claim that is mere coincidence, one only need look at their previous actions to see how little support they offer the LGBTQ students of CCPS.

In April 2022, a LGBTQ student, with support of the Westminster chapter of PFLAG, offered to donate pride flags to each school in the district for staff to take if they chose to do so. In response, the BOE voted 4-1 (Dr. Patricia Dorsey being the only one to dissent) to ban all pride flags from schools. This sent a very clear message to all LGBTQ students, staff and allies that their safety and acceptance were not a priority to the BOE.

Continuing to entertain these book ban requests appears to go against state standards. The legislation, if passed, will put a stop to CCPS excluding material “because of the origin, background, or views of a person who created the material; and, because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval”.

The language to prevent retaliation against a library employee for acting in accordance with state standards is particularly relevant to what is happening right now in Carroll County. In late 2023, CCPS updated Appendix J – Library Media Supplemental Material Verification Form. CCPS Media Specialists are now required to read each book they want to purchase ahead of time and complete/sign the Appendix J form accordingly. The content of Appendix J is troubling as it requires the media specialist to personally guarantee that the book meets a laundry list of “selection criteria”, including one which states there is no sexually explicit language in the book.

At the time Appendix J was updated, there was no definition for “sexually explicit”. In January 2024, an update to Board Policy IIAA-Selection, Evaluation, Adoption or Instructional Material was approved by the BOE to define “sexually explicit” as “unambiguously describing, depicting, showing, or writing about sex or sex acts in a detailed or graphic manner.” The definition is too broad and as such is very much open to interpretation. It was crafted without any input from CCPS Media Specialists. These are the trained professionals who dedicate their careers to helping put age-appropriate books into the hands of students, yet they were left entirely out of

the conversation. Appendix J, whether intentional or not, appears to signal Media Specialists to tread very carefully when ordering new titles or risk retaliation by the BOE.

I support a favorable outcome for SB0738. Media Specialists are the experts in selecting titles for schools. They should be left to do what they are educated and trained to do. It is also essential that they be protected from retaliation when following state standards conflicts with the ideology of BOE members.

SB738.pdf

Uploaded by: Mary Baykan

Position: FAV

Testimony in Favor of
SB738
Freedom to Read Act
Hearing Before
The Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee
February 23, 2024

Chairman Feldman and Honored Members of the Committee,

Citizens for Maryland Libraries (CML), wish to voice its strong support for this bill. CML is a non-profit association that works to build greater public awareness of the need for the services that Maryland libraries across the state provide its citizens. Recognizing the importance of our public libraries to the over three million card carrying Maryland library users, CML is a strong statewide network of individuals and organizations who value and advocate for Maryland libraries.

To read and read well is the single best predictor that a child will be successful in school and successful in life. Children and young adult librarians, in our public libraries, receive advanced formal education and training in order to dedicate their lives in helping our children find the resources they need to become lifelong readers. They are careful to provide reading materials and literary works that are well reviewed and that contribute to a well-rounded collection appropriate for each age. On any given day, a child or teenager can go to their library and find something to read that speaks to their culture, experience, and life challenges, helping them to understand that they are not alone.

Passing SB738 would protect 1st Amendment rights of both children and parents. Most importantly, it protects the right of each individual parent to decide what is permissible for their child to read and takes that decision away from the arbitrary whim of certain interest groups. We ask passage of this bill.

SB 738 Freedom to Read Act PGCMLS.pdf

Uploaded by: Megan Sutherland

Position: FAV



Senate Bill 738
Freedom to Read Act
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 23, 2024
SUPPORT

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Committee Members,

The Prince George's County Memorial Library System (PGCMLS) strongly supports **SB 738 Freedom to Read Act**, which codifies the state's commitment to professional library standards statewide, including principles for curating a responsible library collection, collection maintenance policies, and reconsideration requests. Importantly, it also protects library workers against retaliation for following those standards.

The Freedom to Read Act ensures that each library can tailor its collection to meet the needs of its community. Prince George's County Memorial Library System is proud to serve one of the largest and most diverse communities in the state, with a population that is 64% Black and nearly 21% Hispanic or Latino, according to U.S. Census data. Our collection of materials, for fulfilling the educational, informational, recreational, and cultural needs of Prince George's County, must reflect that diversity.

As with the provisions in this legislation, our Board of Library Trustees' approved Collection Development Policy prohibits the exclusion or removal of material because of the creator's origin, background, or views. While our professional library staff considers over a dozen criteria before selecting an item for our collection, we firmly believe that the choice of library materials and resources for personal use is an individual matter. Customers are free to not choose materials for their own use if they do not personally approve of them.

Prince George's County Memorial Library System developed the national award-winning Rock Banned awareness program to inform customers about intellectual freedom and draw attention to the increase in book challenges nationally. Now is the time to enshrine Maryland's protections for our library collections and workers. We ask that you **favorably recommend SB 738** for passage.

Sincerely,

Mark Winston, Ph. D.
CEO

HB785 _ SB738 - Freedom to Read Act (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Michele Copper

Position: FAV

HB785 / SB738 - Freedom to Read Act

Testimony Submitted by Michele Schlehofer Copper

Dear Chair Delegate Atterbeary, Vice Chair Delegate Wilkins, and members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for **House Bill 785**, the **Freedom to Read Act**, a bipartisan piece of legislation which is vital to protecting people's access to information in our public libraries and to protect libraries from censorship efforts.

The last three years have witnessed an enormous surge in requests to remove books from schools and libraries. Rather than the occasional complaint from a concerned parent, librarians have been facing coordinated challenges to long lists of titles, submitted by organized political groups such as Moms for Liberty and their counterparts. Even more concerning, librarians are facing significant pressure to remove books without adhering to established book challenge procedures, at risk of losing their jobs.

Libraries in Maryland have not been immune from these challenges. Here in Wicomico County, where I reside, *All Boys Aren't Blue* was removed from school libraries under the direction of former Superintendent of Schools Dr. Donna Hanlin—despite the fact that no one filed a book reconsideration request and without putting the book through the district's reconsideration procedure. Several other titles were temporarily removed from school library shelves—again, despite the lack of any formal reconsideration request. The school board is currently under pressure from a coordinated political group to remove *even more* titles—books ranging from preschool picture books to high school fiction—again, despite the lack of any formal reconsideration request and without putting the books under the district's reconsideration procedure.

The Freedom to Read Act would protect against these assaults on intellectual freedom by requiring that all public libraries, including school libraries, adopt a collection development policy that complies with new State standards in order to qualify for funding. Those standards state that libraries cannot exclude materials from the collection or remove them based on partisan or doctrinal disapproval. The bill also seeks to protect library staff by prohibiting county boards of education and governing bodies from retaliating against employees who act in a manner consistent with State standards.

All members of our community should see themselves reflected in library materials, and should be able to access materials representing a diversity of perspectives. Restricting materials is counterintuitive to the American ideals of liberty, and supporting the Freedom to Read should not be a political issue. Reading is a foundational skill, critical to future learning and to exercising our democratic freedoms. Libraries provide access to books that offer teachable moments for readers of all ages and expand our understanding of people with different backgrounds, ideas, and beliefs. It is more important than ever to stand up for the First Amendment rights of students and library users. I urge you to give **HB785 / SB738 - Freedom to Read Act** a **favorable** report in committee.

FREEDOM TO READ.pdf

Uploaded by: Nicole Hollywood

Position: FAV



LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

Bill: SB738/HB785 Freedom to Read Act

Organization: PFLAG Salisbury Inc., PO Box 5107, Salisbury Maryland 21802

Submitted by: Nicole Hollywood, Board Member

Position: **FAVORABLE**

SALISBURY PFLAG SUPPORTS THE FREEDOM TO READ

Greetings. My name is Nicole Hollywood. I am a professor in the University System of Maryland, a member of the Maryland Commission for LGBTQIA+ Affairs, a board member of PFLAG Salisbury, a resident of the Eastern Shore, and a parent. I am submitting this testimony in FAVOR of **SB738/HB785** The Freedom to Read Act on behalf of PFLAG Salisbury, the Salisbury, Maryland Chapter of PFLAG National.

Banning books is expensive and forces counties to divert crucial time and resources to address insidious efforts to curtail students' freedom to read, the result of which hurts students and communities. In a September release, the ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom reported that the number of unique titles challenged in the first 8 months of 2023 jumped 20% over 2022, with most of the challenges relating to books "written by or about a person of color or a member of the LGBTQIA+ community."

Inclusive storybooks advance interests in ensuring a safe, supportive environments in which all youth can thrive. At PFLAG Salisbury, we believe that youth need to read books and be exposed to curriculum that act as both mirrors (seeing their identities and experiences reflected) and windows (learning about others' identities and experiences.) This means that young people need to be able to see a reflection of themselves, but they also must be encouraged to see outwards and consider perspectives and experiences different from their own. The result of exposing young people to only insular and homogenous materials forces them to develop a skewed, inaccurate version of the diversity of our society that extends the disconnect and marginalization of underrepresented groups – particularly LGBTQIA+ youth and youth of color.

GLAAD explains "Book bans violate First Amendment rights, the rights of parents to decide what's best for their children, waste taxpayer money and resources, undermine the ability of teachers and librarians to effectively manage their classrooms and book collections, and above all, block the essential right of children to learn about themselves and the world while seeing themselves reflected in the pages of a book."

Salisbury PFLAG supports establishing State standards for libraries that receive funding from the State; altering the duties of the State Library Board, the State Library Agency, and regional resource centers to incorporate the State standards for libraries; making funding for libraries contingent on adoption of a written policy consistent with the State standards for libraries; requiring the State Librarian to authorize the State Comptroller to withhold funding from libraries under certain circumstances; prohibiting county boards of education and the governing bodies of certain libraries from retaliating against employees for acting in a manner consistent with the State standards for libraries; and etcetera. Therefore, PFLAG Salisbury Inc. supports the bill under consideration and recommends a FAVORABLE report in committee.

Testimony in support of SB0738.pdf

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

2/21/2024

Richard Keith Kaplowitz
Frederick, MD 21703

TESTIMONY ON SB#/0738 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Freedom to Read Act

TO: Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3. I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB#/0738, Freedom to Read Act

This bill makes censorship of literature because of discomfort with its contents less likely that one or a small group can determine for the majority what is or is not permissible in a library. The current acceleration of book bans is an epidemic. In my county alone, Frederick, one individual, using a list from a conservative group, challenged 35 books in school libraries.¹

Significant time and resources had to review those books just because one person did not like their sexual or minority content. Almost all the books had LGBTQ or minority populations or authors' content. Because I am offended by something then you have no right to it, these individual's opinion is the only one that counts when it comes to what should be permitted to be available.

Parents may control what their own children read, but don't have a right to restrict what books are available to other people. Parents who don't like specific books can have their kids opt out of an assignment without infringing on the rights of others.

Many frequently challenged books help people get a better idea of the world and their place in it. Robie H. Harris, author of frequently challenged children's books including *It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing up, Sex, and Sexual Health*, stated, "I think these books look at the topics, the concerns, the worry, the fascination that kids have today... It's the world in which they're living."

Books are a portal to different life experiences and reading encourages empathy and social-emotional development. One study found that reading J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, which is frequently challenged for religious concerns about witchcraft, "improved attitudes" about immigrants, homosexuals, and refugees.

This bill is necessary and serves to respond to those people whose political agenda is that their small group should have the power to control the majority and suppress anything that troubles them for everyone else. **I respectfully urge this committee to return an favorable report on SB#/0738.**

¹ https://www.fredericknewspost.com/news/continuing_coverage/challenged_books/fcps-committee-bans-1-of-35-challenged-books-sets-limits-on-2-others/article_b506ce70-c527-5a12-a684-4ba42f553212.html

Weich Testimony Freedom to Read SB 738.pdf

Uploaded by: Ronald Weich

Position: FAV

**TESTIMONY OF RONALD WEICH
DEAN OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE SCHOOL OF LAW**

IN SUPPORT OF THE FREEDOM TO READ ACT (SB 738)

MARYLAND SENATE

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

February 21, 2024

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the Committee: I serve as dean of the University of Baltimore School of Law. Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Senate Bill 738, the Freedom to Read Act.

As a law school dean, I have a professional and personal interest in the preservation of constitutional protections, including the foundational elements of the First Amendment. Because my duties include oversight of the University of Baltimore Law Library, I have a strong institutional interest in the effective operation of libraries for the benefit of my students and other library patrons.

The Freedom to Read Act (SB 738) establishes standards for state-funded libraries. The bill states that libraries should not exclude materials because of the origin, background or views of a person who created the material, nor should a library prohibit or remove material from its catalog because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval. In these ways, the bill protects libraries as they defend against unconstitutional censorship.

The bill does not dictate the topics or titles that must be in a library, nor does it force anyone from borrowing items they find objectionable. It simply codifies the principle of open and inclusive access to library materials, consistent with the First Amendment, and protects library staff from being penalized for their important work.

Unfortunately, we have seen a national movement to constrain and censor library materials, as well as efforts to penalize the crucial work carried out by library staff. Some of these challenges have reached Maryland and should be halted before they take root.

For these reasons, I am proud to support the Freedom to Read Act, which reasserts the constitutional principle that library materials, services and resources are essential for the interest, information and enlightenment of all individuals served by libraries.

SB738 King Sponsor Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Senator Nancy King

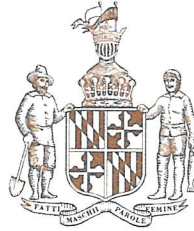
Position: FAV

NANCY J. KING
Legislative District 39
Montgomery County

MAJORITY LEADER

Budget and Taxation Committee

Chair
Education, Business and
Administration Subcommittee



James Senate Office Building
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401
Senate Bill 738 – Freedom to Read Act

February 23, 2024

Mister Chairman and Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

According to the Maryland State Library Agency, Maryland's public libraries have seen a 133% increase in formal challenges to their collections, and a 263% increase in informal challenges since 2019. And, in a September 2023 survey by the Maryland Association of School Librarians (MASL), 70% of respondents reported book challenges at their school districts.

Along with these challenges, librarians in our state and across the county have seen a rise in what the American Library Association refers to as Hateful Conduct. They define hateful conduct as conduct that promotes intimidation and hate against people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or serious disease. While hateful conduct often does not meet the criteria of criminal harassment or stalking statutes, it is still behavior that librarians, patrons and library collections are being subjected to.

Senate Bill 738 - The Freedom to Read Act - is being introduced to protect Maryland's library collections, the librarians who curate them and the patrons who access them. This crucial and timely legislation will safeguard our libraries and librarians from becoming the next frontier of censorship aimed at limiting the world views accessible to our communities.

The Freedom to Read Act will establish a set of State Standards for Libraries that enshrine into law the following:

- Library materials exist and should be provided for the interest, information, and
- enlightenment of all persons the library serves in Maryland.
- A library should not exclude material from its catalog because of the origin, background, or views of a person who created the material.
- A library should not proscribe or remove material from its catalog because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

The bill then:

- directs any library, school library, resource center, or any other library to adopt and follow a written policy consistent with these State Standards;
- protects our school and public library workers by preventing punitive actions being taken against them for their adherence to the State Standards for Libraries;
- safeguards Maryland's public library collections from intentional attempts to remove or damage materials by increasing fines for offenders.

Libraries and librarians play an integral role in our communities and are a treasure that deserves all the support and protection that we can offer and so I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 738.

SB 0738.pdf

Uploaded by: Sharon Sinsky-Hopkins

Position: FAV

SHARON SINSKY HOPKINS
822 Thompson Creek Road
Stevensville, MD 21666
sharonbhopkins@gmail.com

February 22, 2024

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, Senator King, and members of the committee:

I am writing to support the SB 0738 Freedom to Read Act to establish state standards for libraries that receive funding from the State. This act mandates all libraries to enact comprehensive policies covering collection selection, maintenance, and re-consideration requests. The act emphasizes strict adherence to those policies.

The Freedom to Read Act strongly reasserts the constitutional principle that library materials, services, and resources are essential for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all individuals served by the library. The selection of these materials, services, and resources is intended to be inclusive, representing the diversity of the community.

This legislation actively safeguards local control of the selection process, empowering libraries to operate within the defined scope set by their board and the state library.

While the majority of the public stand firmly against censorship, we have seen a national movement to constrain and censor library materials according to the standards of only a section of a community. There have been efforts to penalize or criminalize the crucial work conducted by library staff. Some of these challenges have reached Maryland. This proposed bill defends libraries and library staff from punitive actions for doing their work within the policies of their libraries.

The Freedom to Read Act protects library materials from intentional harm or restriction of access by individuals, acknowledging these items as communal property. Library materials, services, and resources are vital to successful schools and thriving communities. Please support the passage of this important legislation.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sharon Sinsky-Hopkins

Sharon Sinsky-Hopkins
Board Member, Citizens for Maryland Libraries
Trustee, Queen Anne's County Free Library

SB738 Freedom to Read testimony - Support - Skip A

Uploaded by: Skip Auld

Position: FAV



**Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
February 23, 2024 -- Support**

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Committee Members,

I am writing **in support of SB 738, the Freedom to Read Act**. This bill not only protects library collections and librarians from censorship and personal attacks, but safeguards marginalized communities and our democracy.

It's hard to imagine that censorship and attacks on librarians are happening in our state but over the last five years, more than half of Maryland's public libraries have faced book challenges or far worse. In fact, in that same period, libraries have experienced a 600% increase in staff threats and 11 bomb threats related to this issue. HB 785 would protect not only Marylanders' access to the books they want but the librarians who serve our communities.

Overwhelmingly, book bans target titles featuring or written by LGBTQ+ people as well as stories on racism and gender identity. These stories of diverse perspectives, accurate cultural histories and underrepresented voices need to be shared. All people deserve to see themselves represented in books. Not only does it matter on an individual level but for the betterment of our society.

Proponents of censorship often use the argument that their efforts center on protecting children. Indeed, parents have every right to guide their children's reading, but a parent or small group of parents should not dictate what books other people's children can read. Successful book bans, like many we've seen across the nation, remove access for all members of the community and threaten freedom of thought and speech -- values that underpin our republic.

We respectfully ask for your support of SB 738 to ensure Marylanders have access to the materials they want, library staff have the protections they need to keep delivering outstanding service, and our democracy remains intact. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Skip Auld, AACPL Chief Executive Officer

Anne Arundel County
Public Library
5 Harry S. Truman Parkway
Annapolis MD 21401
410-222-7371
aacpl.net

Written Testimony in Support of SB 738 Freedom to

Uploaded by: Sonia Alcantara-Antoine

Position: FAV



SB 738 Support

Freedom to Read Act

Senate of Maryland Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Good afternoon, Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the Committee:

I am the Chief Executive Officer of Baltimore County Public Library. I am also the President of the Public Library Association, the largest association dedicated to supporting the unique and evolving needs of public library professionals. PLA serves nearly 9,000 members in public libraries across the United States and Canada. I'm speaking today in support of SB 738.

The freedom to read is a basic and fundamental right that all Marylanders enjoy: the freedom to access information, to learn about and explore ideas and perspectives that might be different from one's own, and to think critically. It is through this access that people can explore what it means to be human and can gain both self-awareness and respect for others. Through the lenses of history and context readers can gain knowledge about the world and their place in it. Further, reading and having unfettered access to information help people be better informed as citizens, which is essential for healthy and thriving democracies.

Recently, however, Marylanders' right to the freedom to read has been threatened. There are efforts within our own state that undermine the freedom to read and threaten libraries and librarians for upholding the right to read. Public libraries are trusted educational and cultural assets that unite communities and yet have been caught in the pernicious culture wars that seek to divide us all.

Libraries have trained staff who carefully and thoughtfully curate collections for their communities based on established professional standards. Public libraries provide access to a broad range of materials from diverse voices and perspectives. Libraries don't tell people how to think. Instead, libraries provide access to a marketplace of ideas and information so that people can think for themselves.

In Maryland, internal data shows that the number of formal book challenges in public libraries has increased by 133% between 2019 and 2023, with a peak of 233% in 2022. The number of individuals submitting book challenges to Maryland public libraries increased by 245% in the past year. This is mirrored nationwide where in the first 9 months of 2023, 49% of all book challenges were aimed at public libraries and public librarians, a dramatic increase from 16% the year prior¹.

In addition, there are attempts by governments, local and state, and well-funded book banning groups to dictate what books the majority may find in our public libraries, based on the personal biases and beliefs of a vocal minority. And yet, data shows that 71% of voters oppose efforts to

¹ Banned and Challenged Books: 2023 Preliminary Data; <https://uniteagainstbookbans.org/ala-releases-preliminary-2023-book-ban-data/>



**BALTIMORE COUNTY
PUBLIC LIBRARY**

remove books from public libraries². Attempts to censor books are assaults on our American democracy and are fundamentally unpatriotic. Free people read freely.

Public libraries are integral to the quality of life of any community. We are open and welcoming to everyone, providing all a safe space to learn, explore, create and connect. We serve the public good by providing a wealth of resources and services that strengthen individuals and families and uplift the most vulnerable among us. Many public libraries, like BCPL, have social workers and other support specialists on staff to help those in crisis. We partner with other agencies to provide access to free tax help during tax season, free legal help via Lawyer at the Library clinics, free vaccines and COVID test kits via local public health departments, food distribution to children facing food insecurity, free eye examinations and eyeglasses for kids K-12, and so much more. We are actively bridging the digital divide by providing access to computers and the Internet and building digital literacy skills. While the role of public libraries continues to evolve to meet changing community needs, providing access to books and building print literacy remain core to our mission as trusted community assets. When libraries and librarians are undermined because of the books they carry on their shelves, everything else that libraries do to support their communities is imperiled.

The freedom to read for all Marylanders and the work that we do at public libraries should be protected.

I urge a favorable report on SB 738.

Sincerely,

Sonia Alcantara-Antoine

² Voters Oppose Book Bans in Libraries; <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/voters-oppose-book-bans-libraries>

SB738 - FAV Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Tatanisha Love

Position: FAV

SB738
FAV - Support

The Maryland Association of School Librarians stands in staunch support of SB 738, a critical piece of legislation aimed at preserving and promoting the fundamental principles of intellectual freedom and access to information in our state's libraries, including school libraries.

SB 738 is not merely a bill; it is a beacon of liberty, guiding our libraries to operate in accordance with State standards that uphold the principles of intellectual freedom, diversity of thought, and unfettered access to information for all Marylanders.

This legislation is essential for establishing clear guidelines and expectations for libraries, including school libraries, that receive funding from the State. By incorporating State standards into their policies and practices, all libraries can ensure that they remain on the forefront of intellectual freedom, free from censorship or exclusion of materials based on their content or viewpoint. The bill requires libraries to have set policies and procedures for collection development, which is vital for allowing librarians in public, academic, and school libraries to create collections that meet the needs of their community.

Another crucial aspect of the bill is its provision prohibiting retaliation against library employees for acting in a manner consistent with the State standards for libraries. This protection is vital for safeguarding the rights of library staff to uphold these principles without fear of reprisal or retaliation from their employers.

The Freedom to Read Act empowers the State Librarian to withhold funding from libraries that fail to comply with the State standards under certain circumstances. This accountability mechanism ensures that libraries are held accountable for their adherence to these fundamental principles and encourages them to prioritize the protection of intellectual freedom and access to information.

Additionally, by requiring certain actions involving the property of a library to be committed knowingly in order to be considered a crime, the bill strengthens protections for library collections and resources, further safeguarding intellectual freedom and access to information for all Marylanders.

The Freedom to Read Act is a vital safeguard against censorship, discrimination, and infringement upon the rights of individuals to access information freely in all library settings. The Maryland Association of School Librarians urges the Senate to support

this important piece of legislation, as it aligns with the core values of freedom of expression and access to information for all.

Finally, the Maryland Association of School Librarians would like to share an anecdote from one of our members, President-Elect Stacey Nunn, that reminds us why access to books and the freedom to read is so very important, "Books provide a spark of light in dim places. I have heard numerous stories over the years, but perhaps the most touching was shared with me just a few weeks ago. Upon entering the library for the "Battle of the Books" (BOTB) weekly club, a student was so excited to share about the "reading light" she received over the holiday break. She explained that the light allowed her to read the weekly assigned pages for BOTB until she was tired enough to go to sleep. More excitedly, she would not need to get up to turn off the light. She also mentioned the joy of reading about what was happening in the great books she received as a participant in BOTB. This student has attended every book club meeting this year, which convenes on Tuesday mornings at 8:15 am in the library."

A story like this speaks to the same volume just as the spark of light illuminates. Students find comfort in sharing information, having rich discussions, and communicating interest in a safe space.

The library has been and continues to be that spark of light in a place that is needed for students to make world connections that are often housed in the books and information found in the library. Supporting SB 738 is imperative for all of our students.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Sturge, Advocacy Chair

Maryland Association of School Librarians

SB 738 testimony - Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Thomas Vose

Position: FAV

The
Ruth Enlow Library
of GARRETT COUNTY



Community + Opportunity

Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice-Chair
Energy, Education and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

February 22, 2024

Dear Senator Feldman, Senator Kagan, and members of the Committee:

I would like to express my support for **SB 738: Freedom to Read Act** as a sadly necessary piece of legislation in a time of unprecedented attacks on intellectual freedom.

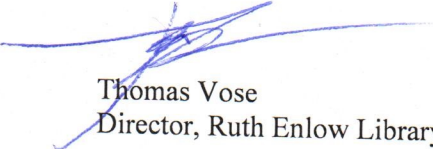
Librarians care about their communities. A lot. I am personally very proud of what we do – we try hard, every day, to make a difference to people and treasure the stories of when we demonstrably do. Libraries take the resources entrusted to us and make them as broadly available to our community as a whole as we can, and we do so fundamentally to promote Library values: values such as equal access for all, intellectual freedom, lifelong learning, fostering democracy, diversity, stewardship of public resources and collaboration. We collect materials widely so as to have something for everyone, regardless of background or interests. Many of these materials I personally disagree with, but they remain, just as they should.

And yet those values are under attack from fringe elements trying to push their personal beliefs on society as a whole, trying to squelch with the force of law people and ideas they disagree with. For the last several years, library staff have had to serve the public with the increasing threat of censorship attempts, personal abuse, disciplinary action or termination – simply for upholding the fundamental values of the profession. This bill affirms the State's willingness to stand for the interests of the public as a whole, rather than a few loud and angry self-appointed moral guardians. This bill ensures that good people will not be punished for following Library principles in the face of censorship efforts. And finally, this bill will help protect the community's materials from theft, which would-be censors often resort to when they know their efforts at control over others will fail.

It's not a librarian's job to decide what people are and aren't allowed to read, and it most definitely isn't anyone else's either. Those who covet that role the most are the ones who should be least trusted with it.

Thank you once again for your ongoing support of Maryland's libraries.

Sincerely,



Thomas Vose
Director, Ruth Enlow Library of Garrett County

Support_SB 738_MLA.pdf

Uploaded by: Tiffany Sutherland

Position: FAV



Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Committee members,

The Maryland Library Association supports SB 738 - Freedom to Read Act.

This vital legislation is a crucial safeguard for our rights to information and open discourse, civil rights, civil liberties, and the integrity of our civil society while also fostering thriving libraries that cater to the unique needs of our diverse communities. In a time when information is abundant but censorship looms, the freedom to read is a cornerstone of civil liberties and democratic principles. The proposed Freedom to Read Act is not merely a legislative initiative but a declaration of the state's commitment to intellectual freedom, civil rights, and the integrity of its institutions.

The bill ensures all libraries have a policy for curating a responsible library collection that fits their community's needs, ensuring that libraries serve as inclusive and accessible repositories of knowledge. In addition, all libraries must have a policy that will dictate how they will handle material reconsideration requests. This bill also shields library staff from punitive measures for carrying out the duties of their jobs within their organization's own policies and procedures, protecting against unwarranted penalties. This bill does not dictate library content or commit a library to any external standards.

The Freedom to Read Act represents a crucial step towards preserving the freedom of information, upholding civil liberties, and safeguarding the integrity of libraries as democratic institutions. By enshrining principles of responsible collection curation, protecting against censorship, and affirming the rights of both patrons and library staff, the bill embodies Maryland's commitment to intellectual freedom and inclusivity. When the freedom to read is increasingly threatened, such legislative measures ensure that libraries remain bastions of diverse viewpoints, challenging ideas, and the foundation of a thriving democracy.

Thank you for your past support of Maryland libraries.

The Maryland Library Association asks that you favorably recommend SB 738 - Freedom to Read Act for passage.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Sutherland
President



SB738 testimony - Howard County Library System.pdf

Uploaded by: Tonya Aikens

Position: FAV



Testimony in support of SB738: Freedom to Read Act
Hearing before the Energy, Education and Environment Committee
February 23, 2024
Submitted by Tonya Aikens, Howard County Library System President & CEO

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express **support for SB738: Freedom to Read Act**. This legislation is designed to ensure the continued excellence of Maryland's libraries and to preserve our ability to be responsive to the unique communities we serve by protecting collections and staff from pressures by government officials and special interest groups.

The Freedom to Read Act establishes basic guidelines for library collection policy while enabling local jurisdictions to independently develop a collection that meets the needs of their community without governmental overreach. This bill ensures students will have access to the resources they need to succeed educationally, to develop strong critical thinking skills, and to become healthy, engaged, and productive citizens.

This bill recognizes the professionalism and trust that not only our staff and Board of Trustees have earned from our community, but also staff and Trustees across the state. It provides safeguards for library staff, protecting them against being penalized for simply doing their job. Additionally, this act strengthens protections against willful theft or damage of the library materials that are purchased at public expense and safeguards local governments from expensive and unnecessary litigation. And, as the title indicates, the bill also safeguards each person's freedom to access and read the material that interests them.

We know that successful, thriving libraries are a requirement for successful, thriving communities. The crucial role that libraries have in guaranteeing each person's access to information cannot be overstated. We applaud the General Assembly's work in codifying the important role of libraries in Maryland by defining standards, supporting library professionals, and protecting the collections of Maryland's libraries from theft and destruction. We support passage of this legislation, knowing it will continue Maryland's legacy of outstanding libraries.

Thank you once again for your ongoing support of Maryland's libraries.

Sincerely,

Tonya Aikens,
President & CEO

SB0738 - FAVORABLE Freedom to Read Act.pdf

Uploaded by: Wendy Novak

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL SB0738 - FAVORABLE

Freedom to Read Act

TO: Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Wendy Novak, Carroll County, Maryland

February 22, 2024

I'm a mom, a Sunday School teacher, and a passionate reader because books are magical. They allow you to have a window to another world, or a mirror into your own. Reading is the key to lifelong learning and helps grow vocabulary. Research shows that high quality library programs are correlated to student achievement and can help close racial achievement gaps. It is good for our students to read; we need to be doing what we can to support them by providing access to a variety of books. Sadly, some parents want to restrict access for all students, not just their own. There has been a huge increase in attempts to restrict what books are available for our children to read. In Carroll County more than fifty-six titles from the school libraries were removed from shelves in response to challenges organized by the local Moms for Liberty chapter. The challenged books included a disproportionate amount of female and non-binary authors, and a disproportionate amount of LGBTQ characters and characters of color. Books that are frequently used for APA curriculum and exams were included on that list, such as "Slaughterhouse-Five," "The Bluest Eye," and "The Handmaid's Tale." Parents are determining what is available in our library; parents that believe our LGBTQ students are not appropriate for their kids to know they exist. Parents that believe discussions about trauma should only be shared with a counselor, anyone that talks about their trauma is open to ridicule, believe books written by survivors of trauma are pornography. These parents are not qualified to determine what should be available for our schools. Carroll created a "Sexually Explicit materials" policy that is so vague, it is likely it will be biased against our LGBTQ community and/or students of color. It is not fair that a student in one county might not have access to materials that interest or represent them because their county will not allow it. Parents can discuss with their own child to determine what books they feel appropriate. Our librarians are trained to curate a selection of materials that will best serve their population. State standards will allow librarians to create the high-quality libraries our students need.

I request a favorable report on Senate Bill 738.

SB 738.Freedom to Read School Library Provisions.p

Uploaded by: John Woolums

Position: FWA

BILL: Senate Bill 738
TITLE: Freedom to Read Act
DATE: February 23, 2024
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS
COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes including school libraries in the scope of this legislation to reform the administration of public libraries. MABE recognizes the intended public policy changes contained in Senate Bill 738 to establish a new set of operating standards and procedures regarding the management of materials available in public libraries. However, the bill would also, for the first time, bring school libraries under the authority of the State Library System. MABE strongly opposes this shift away from school libraries being fully integrated within the public school system.

State law and regulations clearly reflect the longstanding public policy that school libraries are to be operated by and for local school systems. School libraries, unlike public libraries, are staffed and operated in accordance with state regulations under COMAR 13A.05.04.01. These regulations govern the roles of school librarians and media specialists, and the instructional alignment of school library materials. These provisions are uniquely designed to guide the operation of school libraries, and MABE believes these standards should remain in place to ensure that school libraries remain an integral component of the school system, and not the State Library System.

Again, MABE opposes only the provisions of this bill proposing a radical shift away from school system governance authority over school libraries and our school library staff. Specifically, MABE requests an amendment to strike lines 2 through 8 on page 2 of the bill. These provisions inappropriately condition the employment of school system employees working in school libraries on standards developed not by the State Board of Education or local school system but by the State Library Board. Similarly, MABE requests an amendment to remove “SCHOOL LIBRARY” from line 2 on page 3 in order preserve the clear distinction between the role and operations of school libraries from public libraries.

These amendments are needed, in MABE’s view, because Senate Bill 738 would amend the Education Article to empower the State Library Agency and its Board with the new authority to “ENSURE THAT EACH LIBRARY THAT RECEIVES STATE FUNDS IS OPERATED IN A MANNER CONSISTENT WITH THE STATE STANDARDS FOR LIBRARIES.” The bill further explains that “STATE STANDARDS FOR LIBRARIES” MEANS THE PHILOSOPHY FOR THE OPERATION OF A LIBRARY THAT ADHERES TO THE STANDARDS ENUMERATED IN § 18 23–102.1(A) OF THIS SUBTITLE.” MABE’s concern is not with the new state standards for public libraries, but that the bill would place limitations on school system supervision of school library staff based on the staff’s adherence to the new state standards, rather than the COMAR regulations governing school libraries or local school system policy. MABE believes that while these newly proposed standards may be appropriate for public libraries, the state regulations governing school libraries define a much more specific educational and instructionally-aligned role for school libraries.

Maryland’s state regulations adopted by the State Board of Education to govern “Public School Library Programs” (COMAR 13A.05.04.01) state:

“Each local school system shall establish in each school a unified school library media program for the use of all students which shall include, but not be limited to:

- (1) An organized and centrally managed collection of instructional materials and technologies;

- (2) Instruction emphasizing information literacy skills integrated into all content areas;
- (3) Appropriate materials and technologies to support the instructional programs of the local school systems; and
- (4) Certified school library media personnel and support staff.

State regulations further clarify that school libraries are intended to support instruction in accordance with local school system policies. Specifically, regulations describe the roles of school libraries, including: “Evaluating and selecting instructional materials and technologies in accordance with local board of education policies” and “Implementing procedures for the acquisition, organization, circulation, and removal of instructional materials and technologies.” In these ways, MABE believes that longstanding state law and regulations should be maintained regarding the oversight and operation of school libraries as integral to local school system instructional policies, rather than a new statewide policy applicable to not only all public libraries but also school libraries.

MABE’s top legislative priority focuses on strong support for governance authority for local boards of education to adopt education policies and school system budgets reflecting local priorities and resources. MABE supports broad discretion for local board decision-making authority in exercising legislative, judicial, and executive functions in accord with state and federal law and principles of equity and excellence for all students. MABE advocates that state and local initiatives not reduce local board governance or budgetary authority or create unfunded mandates.

MABE believes the principle of local governance by boards of education is fundamental to a sound system of public education; and that a sound system of public education is fundamental to sustaining the well-educated citizenry essential to a flourishing democracy. By retaining decision-making authority at the local level, local boards of education can best balance educational practices, available resources to implement those practices, public input, and academic and financial accountability.

State law provides that “educational matters that affect the counties shall be under the control of a county board of education” and that local boards “determine, with the advice of the county superintendent, the educational policies of the county school system.” Local boards exercise this governance authority in compliance with state and federal laws and in conjunction with the policies and regulations adopted by the State Board of Education.

Each local board plays a vital role in governing the local school system and engaging local communities and promoting participation by parents and other community members in the education process. Local boards are the primary advocates for local, state, and federal funding to support the teaching and learning of students and efficient and effective school system administration. Through MABE’s board development program and other professional development activities, each board is striving to continuously improve its ability to govern in a manner that best meets the needs of all students in the local school system.

Local governance authority of boards of education in Maryland and throughout the nation is often challenged by state, federal, and private sector initiatives. MABE advocates that the General Assembly, Governor, and State Board engage in collaborative development of new policies and programs. MABE appreciates the strong historical record of the General Assembly’s recognition and support for the governance role of local boards.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 738, with the amendments described and provided above.

SB738 FTR Written Testimony SLRC 2.22.2024.pdf

Uploaded by: Liz Sundermann

Position: FWA

It is the job of libraries to provide materials that represent a broad range of interests, beliefs, academic and leisure pursuits, etc. Not every book will be desired by nor appropriate for every reader. Librarians should be protected from being penalized for following their own employers' policies.

Individuals should not have the ability to remove access to materials that are appreciated and needed by others. Adults and families must have the freedom to choose and read the materials that are right for them.

This bill empowers libraries, library workers, school and library boards to ensure that policies exist and are adhered to that safeguard this essential freedom.

EPFL/SLRC advocates for the passage of this bill with the following technical amendment:

Throughout the State Law of Maryland there are several places where “County Library Systems” implicitly or explicitly applies to the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore City, which functions as a County Library System. However, we have received some questions from our Board and concerned citizens that we are not included in the bill as written. **We advocate for the bill to be passed with amendment to change all instances of “County Library Systems” to “County Library Systems and the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore.”**

Sincerely,

Liz Sundermann-Zinger

Chief, Central Library and State Library Resource Center
Enoch Pratt Free Library
400 Cathedral St., Baltimore, MD 21201

SB 738 - Freedom to Read Act.pdf

Uploaded by: Mary Pat Fannon

Position: FWA



PSSAM
Public School Superintendents' Association
OF MARYLAND

Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director
1217 S. Potomac Street
Baltimore, MD 21224
410-935-7281
marypat.fannon@pssam.org

BILL: SB 738
TITLE: Freedom to Read Act
DATE: February 23, 2024
POSITION: Support with Amendments
COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four public school superintendents, **supports SB 738 with amendments.**

This bill establishes State standards for the operation of libraries that receives funding from the State; altering the duties of the State Library Board, the State Library Agency, and regional resource centers to incorporate the State standards for libraries; making funding for certain libraries contingent on adoption of a written policy consistent with the State standards for libraries; authorizing the State Comptroller to withhold funding from libraries under certain circumstances; etc.

PSSAM understands the impetus to change the law regarding public libraries, but strongly opposes the inclusion of public school libraries in the bill. School libraries serve a different purpose than public libraries - to primarily complement and enhance public school *instruction*. This bill would propose an unprecedented shift by putting school libraries under the authority of the State Library System and away from public school systems. Treating the administration of public libraries and school libraries the same will inevitably lead to mismatched policy standards that do not accurately and appropriately suit either system.

Under State law and COMAR 13A.05.04.01, it is clearly stated that school libraries are to be operated by and for local school systems, governing the role of school librarians and media specialists, and the instructional alignment of school library materials. Therefore, we ask to strike p. 2, lines 2-8 of the bill that inappropriately apply employment considerations for school librarians and media specialists based on the State Library standards, instead of these longstanding COMAR provisions.

New standards may be needed for public libraries, but the existing state regulations governing school libraries appropriately define a much more specific educational and instructionally-aligned role for school libraries in accordance with local school system policies.

The Maryland General Assembly, in creating the Maryland State Board of Education and local boards of education, has delegated to them the responsibility of delivering a high-quality statewide system of public education. PSSAM has a longstanding policy of opposing legislative efforts that impinge on local governance. Local superintendents strongly believe that the role of employee management, including instructional staff, librarians and media specialists, belongs solely to local boards of education. *Rest assured, PSSAM's opposition to this bill does not rest on the merits of new standards for public libraries, but rather opposition to statutorily mandating revisions to the management and governance of local school systems.*

For these reasons, PSSAM requests a **favorable with amendments** report on Senate Bill 738 to remove any changes to the current governance structure of school libraries and library staff.

SB738 Freedom to Read Act 2024 UNF.pdf

Uploaded by: Ella Ennis

Position: UNF



Ella Ennis, Legislative Chairman
Maryland Federation of Republican Women
PO Box 6040, Annapolis MD 21401
Email: eee437@comcast.net

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman, Chair
And Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Senate of Maryland, Annapolis, Maryland

RE: **SB 0738** – Freedom to Read Act -- **UNFAVORABLE**

Dear Chairman Feldman and Committee Members,

SB 0738 appears to eliminate a parent's ability to restrict the exposure of their children to materials they deem too violent or sexually explicit.

Some school libraries currently provide a parent the ability to identify materials a parent does not want their children to see. The library database is updated with that information so that those materials cannot be checked out by the child. It appears that will not be allowed under the "State Standards for Libraries" and will be enforced through the threat of the loss of State funds.

Page 14 – lines 10-13 and page 18 lines 19-22 (emphasis added)

The State Librarian shall authorize the State Comptroller to withhold State funds from a library... that does not adopt a written policy that is consistent with the State Standards for Libraries.

A library is no place for politics. Yet page 2 lines 28-29 -- *A library should not prohibit or remove material from its catalogue because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval* (emphasis added) – does just that. The bill does not define "partisan" or "doctrinal". It also does not explain who has the authority to identify an action as "partisan" or "doctrinal" and does not define the criteria that will be used.

The Maryland Federation of Republican Women strongly objects to this punitive approach to controlling parents whose only intent is to exercise their parental right (and responsibility) to direct the upbringing of their children.

The ability of parents to opt their children out of access to certain materials is not a partisan issue. If SB 0738 is not intended to eliminate parental approval of library materials for children under 16 years of age, then it must be amended to facilitate that parental right.

Either amend **SB 0738** accordingly or vote an **UNFAVORABLE** Report.

Sincerely,
Ella Ennis
Legislative Chairman

Opposition - SB738 Freedom to Read.pdf

Uploaded by: Kim Moses

Position: UNF



Worcester County Government

One West Market Street | Room 1103 | Snow Hill MD 21863-1195

(410) 632-1194 | (410) 632-3131 (fax) | admin@co.worcester.md.us | www.co.worcester.md.us

February 22, 2024

Senator Brian J. Feldman
Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
brian.feldman@senate.state.md.us

Senator Cheryle C. Kagan
Education, Energy, and Env. Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
Cheryl.Kagan@senate.state.md.us

Dear Education, Energy, and Environment Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members:

The Worcester County Commissioners unanimously oppose SB 738 – Freedom to Read Act. As written, this bill would hold harmless those attempting to circumvent federal laws restricting the transfer of obscene materials to minors. This legislation would also strip boards of education, governing bodies, parents¹ and community members from having reasonable input into the materials that minors may access in certain libraries, specifically public-school libraries.

Unlike the Motion Picture Association of America's film rating system, which restricts the access of minors to films rated PG-13 (parents strongly cautioned) and R/NC-17 (restricted to audiences aged 17 and over), no such rating protects minors from intentionally or inadvertently accessing explicit materials² in school and public libraries. Therefore, it is incumbent upon BOEs, governing bodies, parents, and community members whose tax dollars fund libraries to have reasonable decision-making authority for both hardcopy and virtual content³ therein.

Because not all hardcopy and virtual content is appropriate for all audiences, we urge you to maintain protections in keeping with federal law that safeguard children, respect the rights of parents, and assure the decision-making authority of local governments and BOEs without the threat of financial repercussion. We thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony W. Bertino, Jr.", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Anthony W. Bertino, Jr.
President

cc: Senator Mary Beth Carozza
Delegate Wayne Hartman
Delegate Charles Otto
Library Director Jennifer Ranck
Library Board President Jeff Smith

¹ Parental Rights and Responsibilities Act of 1995

² See 18 U.S.C. §§ 2252B, 2252C

³ See 47 U.S.C. § 223(d) – Communications Decency Act of 1996, as amended by the PROTECT Act of 2003

Written Testimony for SB 738 (Freedom to Read Act)

Uploaded by: LORNA HENRY

Position: UNF



PJI

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MISSISSIPPI

BOSTON
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CHICAGO
ILLINOIS

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OHIO

COEUR D'ALENE
IDAHO

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COLORADO

DETROIT
MICHIGAN

GALVESTON
TEXAS

HONOLULU
HAWAII

HOUSTON
TEXAS

IOWA CITY
IOWA

LAKE CHARLES
LOUISIANA

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SANTA ANA
CALIFORNIA

SEATTLE
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SPOKANE
WASHINGTON

TRI CITIES
WASHINGTON

TUCSON
ARIZONA

February 22, 2024

Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Education, Energy & the Environment Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: SB 738 – Freedom to Read Act
Testimony of the Pacific Justice Institute

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee:

The Pacific Justice Institute (PJI) is a national non-profit law firm focused on the defense of religious freedoms, parental rights and other civil liberties. I work as PJI's Maryland attorney. We are writing to express our **opposition** to the proposed new law entitled "Freedom to Read Act."

In considering the purpose and potential impact of this legislation, it is important to keep in mind that "[n]o single tradition in public education is more deeply rooted than local control over the operation of schools; local autonomy has long been thought essential both to the maintenance of community concern and support for public schools and to quality of the educational process. [Our courts have] . . . observed that local control over the educational process affords citizens an opportunity to participate in decision-making, permits the structuring of school programs to fit local needs, and encourages 'experimentation, innovation, and a healthy competition for educational excellence.'" *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717, 741-42 (1974).

While the State Department of Education and the State Superintendent have general supervisory authority over public elementary and secondary education¹ much of the duty and authority to operate public schools has been delegated to local boards of education. It is clearly stated, in Md. Code Ann., Educ. § 4-101(a), that educational matters affecting counties shall be under the control of a county board of education in each county.²

This highly cherished concept of "local control" in America can be traced to the classical liberal belief in individual autonomy and a healthy fear of government infringement. Local control maintains and stimulates the interests of parents and the community's interests in the children's education. Only local control can provide flexibility in educational programs to meet a particular community's needs. Local control is also necessary for experimentation and innovation.

¹ Md. Code Ann., Educ. § 2-106(2) states that the State Department of Education has authority over the "general care and supervision" of public education." *See also* Md. Code Ann., Educ. § 2-205(g)(2). ("Through the State Superintendent, the State Board shall exercise general control and supervision over the public schools and educational interests of this State.")

² County boards of education referred to herein also include the Board of Education of Baltimore City.

This Bill significantly and substantially removes local control from Maryland Boards of Education (“BOEs”).

As the Bill’s “Purpose Statement” explicitly acknowledges, this legislation would require local BOEs to incorporate State standards for libraries; make funding from the State contingent on adoption of a written policy consistent with State standards for libraries; and require the State Librarian to authorize the State Comptroller to withhold funding from libraries who do not adhere to these State standards.

State standards for libraries is defined as “the philosophy for the operation of a library” that aligns with requirements such as prohibiting a library from excluding material from its catalogue because of “the origin, background, or views of a person who created the material”; and restricting a library from “prohibit[ing], or remov[ing] material from its catalogue because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.” County Boards rather than State Librarians are better equipped to identify the unique needs of their local communities; yet this legislation requires that County Boards adhere to the philosophical preferences of the State even if adherence is contrary to the local needs and wishes of the communities they serve.

Equally concerning, and with good reason, are Sections 23-205(G)(1) and (2) which tie adoption of and compliance with State philosophical standards to the receipt of State funding of library programs. These sections mandate that the State Librarian authorize the State Comptroller to withhold State funds from libraries that do not adopt a written policy that is consistent with the State standard for libraries.

It is undisputed that educators are entitled to exert control over library materials to ensure that readers are not exposed to material that may be inappropriate for their level of maturity. These decisions are permissible as they are reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns. *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*, 484, U.S. 260 (1988). This Bill takes control and discretion away from local BOEs and requires that they adopt policies that may run counter to the interests of their community or else risk losing funding.

Deciding what library materials will be available to children should be decided within the parameters of the law as it is written. Equally important, it should be left to the local BOE, with parents and community members having input. Local BOEs and school administrators should be held accountable when the materials they choose are inappropriate or not sufficiently diverse and they should not be stripped of their right to implement community-aligned policies when appropriate.

This Bill indefensibly removes this responsibility from local control and places it within the control of the State. The mandates presented in the Bill would prevent parents and local school board members who may disagree with the materials in the public school library from participating in the educational process.

When the State government overreaches and becomes heavily involved in educational decisions, the community loses all its influence, and parental interest in education decreases.

Each BOE must take seriously its responsibility to ensure that all diverse viewpoints are expressed in its library’s materials. Equally important is that all views on how

and at what age some topics are presented should be included in the decision-making. This Bill seeks to restrict and eliminate this right to the detriment of our democracy and public school system.

We ask that you issue an unfavorable report to this bill. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

/s/ Lorna M. Henry

Lorna M. Henry, Esq.
Maryland Staff Attorney
Pacific Justice Institute
Main: (949) 570-9985
Cell: (410) 504-2450

SB0738 OPPOSE kids reading porn in libraries.pdf

Uploaded by: Peggy Williams

Position: UNF

SB0738 Freedom to Read Act OPPOSE

Dear Committee Members,

The name of the bill should read “Freedom to Read Porn Act,” or “Freedom to Read Age-Inappropriate Materials Act.” There is no banning of books. These books can be bought in stores, if parents so choose to show their children this material. Most parents do not want to expose children to sexualizing material for obvious reasons. I strongly oppose this bill.

Peggy Williams

Severna Park

D31

SB0738 Do NOT Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Stacy Pedersen

Position: UNF

Dear Delegates,

This has no place in our schools for teachers or students. This is opening the door to too many inappropriate materials that our children can read. It's unbelievable that many of you don't see the agenda being pushed here to degrade our society by allowing things to be available publicly.

Please **do not** support SB0738!

Sincerely,

Stacy Pedersen

SB 738 Copy 1 Written Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Suzie Scott

Position: UNF



Senate Bill 738 Cross-filed with HB 785

Title: Freedom to Read Act

Hearing Date: February 23, 2024

Position: UNFAVORABLE

Committee: Education, Energy and Environment

Moms for Liberty Maryland Legislative Committee requests an unfavorable report for SB 738. Deceptively titled, “Freedom to Read Act,” SB 738 will remove local control of school and public libraries and compel them to submit to State Standards. These state standards have reframed sexually explicit material as “Diverse” and “Inclusive.”

<https://www.youtube.com/clip/UgkxkMJFBkH5IFLMAaQaDR1iups-9FDZ5tNj>

Sexually explicit materials are finding their way into our school libraries based on these standards. Parents objecting to these materials are being labelled book banners. Moms for Liberty Maryland Legislative Committee does not condone censorship. All of the books on the American Library Association’s list of most challenged books are available in our public libraries and can be purchased freely. We have no problem with that. All these books are available to any adult who wants to give them to their children. Where we do have a problem is when these graphic and sexually explicit materials wind up in our public school libraries.

<https://www.baltimoresun.com/2023/09/28/harford-county-board-of-education-member-names-six-books-that-concerned-parents-deem-inappropriate/>

No amount of diversity sanitizes sexually explicit content from children's eyes. Pornography cast through a lens of "representation" is still pornography. Parents and taxpayers have the first amendment right to petition their local school board when they have a concern about a book that contains age inappropriate material. This does not make them book banners. This is what responsible parents do—protect their children's innocence. This legislation will usurp local control and infringe on parent's rights to direct the education of their children. The argument from the proponents of this legislation is that we must trust the professionals. These professionals have knowingly put inappropriate material in our school libraries and now they look to legislation to protect them from liability and to keep the pipeline of obscene materials flowing. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/09/15/american-library-association-book-bans/>

Carroll County Board of Education has unanimously passed a policy to ensure that age inappropriate materials were removed from their media centers/school libraries. This local decision has been met with cries of censorship and book banning. <https://www.wmar2news.com/local/carroll-county-school-board-oks-change-prohibiting-sexually-explicit-content>

This legislation is an attempt to remove the local control of the Carroll County Board of Education and other Boards of Education and force them to follow the State Standards. This is the loophole those with an agenda to sexualize our children will use if this bill is passed. The American Library Association and MD State Standards are responsible for putting these sexually explicit materials in our school libraries now. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/american-library-association-president-marxist-lesbian-rcna98254>

Parents are losing patience with this radical attempt to expose our children to material many find offensive and far from educational.

Rasmussen Research found that 77% of voters are concerned that school age children are being exposed to sexual material that is not age appropriate.

https://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/partner_surveys/voters_against_obscene_books_in_public_schools

When it comes to the professional best equipped to determine what is appropriate for children, parents trump librarians every time. Please respect parents rights to direct the education and upbringing of their children and to retain local standards for school and public libraries. This legislation is unnecessary.

Moms for Liberty Maryland Legislative Committee requests an unfavorable report for SB 738.

Respectfully submitted,

Suzie Scott

Chair

Moms for Liberty Maryland Legislative Committee

support testimony SB 738 HB 785 Hahn 240220.pdf

Uploaded by: Terri Kocher

Position: UNF

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

Terri Kocher

Member

Harford County Board of Education

Testimony SB 738 HB 785 Kocher 240223.pdf

Uploaded by: Terri Kocher

Position: UNF

WRITTEN TESTIMONY: Senate Bill 738 Cross-filed with HB 785

Title: Freedom to Read Act Hearing

Date: February 23, 2024

Position: UNFAVORABLE

Committee: Education, Energy and Environment

I hereby request an unfavorable report for SB 738. The “Freedom to Read Act,” SB 738 will remove freedom from local school libraries and mandate state standards, thus contradicting its title. These state standards allow “diverse” and “inclusive” materials to include sexually explicit materials. There is no obscenity rating system for literature and library materials as there is for movies; and a more useful legislation would be to develop such a rating system and a curation procedure for school libraries. Absent defined standards for obscene materials, the American Library Association and MD State Standards allow sexually explicit materials in our school libraries now. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/american-library-association-president-marxist-lesbian-rcna98254>

Sexually explicit materials have been accessed by children in our school libraries based on these standards. Adoption of this legislation removes freedom and interferes with parents’ rights to determine whether and how to provide their children sexually explicit information that they choose. According to Rasmussen Research, the majority of voters are concerned that school age children are being exposed to sexual material that is not age appropriate.

“Sixty-nine percent (69%) of voters believe books containing explicit sexual depictions of sex acts, including homosexual sex, should not be present in public high school libraries. The majority opposed to sexually explicit books in public school libraries rises to 79% for middle schools and 85% for elementary schools.”

https://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/partner_surveys/voters_against_obscene_books_in_public_schools

SB 738 is contradictory to SB0355 which prohibits display of obscene material to minors. Graphic and sexually explicit materials are not age appropriate and do not contribute positively to education and thus are not appropriate to be in our public school libraries. Pornography framed as inclusive and diverse is still pornography. Magazines such as Playboy and Hustler would never be considered for a school library, and neither should materials of the types we have seen already in school libraries.

The hidden agenda to sexualize our children does exist – including to allow children to make life-altering decisions without parental awareness. There are many laws which support parental

rights in these areas. Those who push unlimited access to graphic and sexually explicit materials in schools deny this agenda. Let's assume positive intent. If these materials are being promulgated without such an agenda, then surely everyone would agree with SB 738, that display of obscene materials is prohibited for minors. When these materials that are in our libraries cannot even be read in a public meeting due to embarrassment and obscenity, it is a clear indication that the materials describing or depicting sexual acts are not appropriate for our children.

I urge you to look past the accusations of "book banning" which are not applicable here. Parents are free to obtain any materials they choose when discussing these personal topics. The books on the American Library Association's list of most challenged books are available in our public libraries and can be purchased freely.

This is simply a question of age and educational appropriateness for materials in our schools, and allowing each school district and family to make those choices.

Please respect parents' rights for their children and preserve local standards for school libraries. This legislation is contrary to the views of the majority of voters.

I request an unfavorable report for SB 738.

Respectfully submitted,

Terri Kocher

Terri Kocher

Grandparent and parent

Member Harford County

Board of Education

02.14.24 LOO SB 0738 Joint.pdf

Uploaded by: Terry Hale

Position: UNF

Danielle Hornberger
County Executive

Steven Overbay
Director of Administration

Office: 410.996.5202
Email: dhornberger@ccgov.org



Jackie Gregory
Council President

Robert Meffley
Vice President

Office: 410.996.5201
Email: council@ccgov.org

CECIL COUNTY GOVERNMENT
Cecil County Administration Building
200 Chesapeake Boulevard, Elkton, MD 21921

February 14, 2024

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB 0738 – Freedom to Read Act
Letter of Opposition

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

The County Council and the County Executive of Cecil County unanimously oppose SB 0738 - Freedom to Read Act. The Hearing on this legislation is scheduled on February 23, 2024.

It is our understanding that this legislation is Establishing the State standards for libraries for the operation of each library that receives funding from the State; altering the duties of the State Library Board, the State Library Agency, and regional resource centers to incorporate the State standards for libraries; making funding for certain libraries contingent on adoption of a written policy consistent with the State standards for libraries; authorizing the State Comptroller to withhold funding from libraries under certain circumstances; etc.

We strongly believe that the decision on what is provided for our libraries and schools is best left to our families and our local community to decide. Cecil County strongly opposes this legislation.

The County Executive and County Council of Cecil County respectfully request that the Education, Energy and Environment Committee send an unfavorable report on SB 0738.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D.H.", is written over a white background.

Danielle Hornberger
County Executive

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jackie Gregory", is written over a white background.

Jackie Gregory
President of County Council

Tibbals_ OPPOSE SB 738_ HB 785_ Freedom to Read Ac

Uploaded by: Trudy Tibbals

Position: UNF

SB 738/HB 785: Freedom to Read Act: Please OPPOSE this bill!!

Dear Education, Energy and Environment Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, Ways and Means Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and all other esteemed Committee Members:

I urge you to think carefully before voting on this bill. This is important legislation that will affect all of our children.

Part of the bill states:

"...IT IS THE GOAL OF THE STATE THAT EACH LIBRARY IS OPERATED IN A MANNER THAT RECOGNIZES THE FOLLOWING STANDARDS:

LIBRARY MATERIALS, SERVICES, AND RESOURCES EXIST AND SHOULD BE PROVIDED FOR THE INTEREST, INFORMATION, AND ENLIGHTENMENT OF ALL PERSONS THE LIBRARY SERVES;

A LIBRARY SHOULD NOT PROHIBIT OR REMOVE MATERIAL FROM ITS CATALOGUE BECAUSE OF PARTISAN OR DOCTRINAL DISAPPROVAL...."

This is very broad language for what types of materials would be put in front of our children. I can only imagine that each and every one of you, especially those of you that are parents, would like a diverse variety of materials to be available for our children to be able to access to help them in their school studies. I would also imagine that those of you that are parents would not like inappropriate materials to be available to our children to distract them from their studies while in school and at home.

Therefore, I implore to vote against this bill as it is currently written. The language in this bill is too vague as it is currently written to protect our children from inappropriate materials that have no scholastic application for our children to enhance their studies. As I'm sure you are aware, there are currently pornographic and obscene materials in our school libraries that do not in any way add any scholastic value to our children; they do not enhance the academic subjects that our students are studying. The language in this bill does not account for any pornographic or obscene materials being placed in our school libraries and being available to our children. These types of materials are inappropriate in a learning environment, whether they are inappropriate for a child's age or for the subject matter or for the pictures or other visual media, etc. Simply put, pornographic or obscene material should NOT be available to our children in our public school libraries!!

I am including a copy of written testimony I submitted for Senate Bill 355: Criminal Law - Display of Obscene Material to Minors - Prohibition. There are links and sources within this testimony that show how damaging pornographic and obscene material to the brains and mental health of children.

Thank you for your courtesy and cooperation in OPPOSING this dangerous bill.

Trudy Tibbals
A Very Concerned Mother and Maryland resident

P.S. Here is my testimony for Senate Bill 355: **Criminal Law - Display of Obscene Material to Minors - Prohibition.**

"Regardless of your political affiliation, I think we can all agree that pornographic, obscene, inappropriate material, whatever term you want to use, is very damaging to minor children! Here are a few objective resources and their citations.

"Pornographic content can harm children. Exposure to pornography at a young age may lead to poor mental health, sexism and objectification, sexual violence, and other negative outcomes. Among other risks, when children view pornography that portrays abusive and misogynistic acts, they may come to view such behaviour as normal and acceptable."

<https://www.unicef.org/harmful-content-online#:~:text=Pornographic%20content%20can%20harm%20children&text=Exposure%20to%20pornography%20at%20a,violence%2C%20and%20other%20negative%20outcomes.>

"Consumption of pornography is associated with many negative emotional, psychological, and physical health outcomes. These include increased rates of depression, anxiety, acting out and violent behavior, younger age of sexual debut, sexual promiscuity, increased risk of teen pregnancy, and a distorted view of relationships between men and women. For adults, pornography results in an increased likelihood of divorce which is also harmful to children. The American College of Pediatricians urges healthcare professionals to communicate the risks of pornography use to patients and their families and to offer resources both to protect children from viewing pornography and to treat individuals suffering from its negative effects...

Sexual predators have purposefully exposed young children to pornography for the purpose of grooming the children for sexual exploitation.¹⁴ Pornography exposure at these young ages often results in anxiety for the child.¹⁵ Children also report feelings of disgust, shock, embarrassment, anger, fear, and sadness after viewing pornography.¹⁶ These children can suffer all of the symptoms of anxiety and depression. They may become obsessed with acting out adult sexual acts that they have seen, and this can be very disruptive and disturbing to the child's peers who witness or are victimized by this behavior. Children under twelve years old who have viewed pornography are statistically more likely to sexually assault their peers.¹⁷ In sum, children exposed to pornographic material are at risk for a broad range of maladaptive behaviors and psychopathology...

There is evidence that society's acceptance of pornography creates unique problems for women. The use of pornography can result in violent and sexually aggressive attitudes towards women. Men who consume pornography are more likely to adopt rape myth ideology, which is that women cause rape or actually enjoy rape or sexual assault...

Pornography use by adolescents and young adults often leads to a distorted view of sexuality and its role in fostering healthy personal relationships. These distortions include the overestimation of the prevalence of sexual activity in the community, the belief that sexual promiscuity is normal, and the belief that sexual abstinence is unhealthy.³⁴ These perspectives are likely to make it more difficult for young people to form lasting, meaningful relationships with the opposite sex, which will ultimately result in more anxiety, depression, and overall life dissatisfaction...

Children suffer many negative effects due to modern society's exposure to and acceptance of pornography. These negative effects include mental disturbance and unrest for the young school age child, including acting out and violent behavior. Because of its harmfulness to children, pornography must never be used as a tool to

teach children human sexuality. For older adolescents and young adults, pornography teaches a false narrative regarding human sexuality and how men and women form healthy sexual relationships. This makes it more difficult for young men and women to form authentic, stable relationships. For parents, pornography is divisive resulting in a decreased quality of marriage and increasing the likelihood of divorce and separation which has been well documented to be harmful to children...”

<https://acpeds.org/position-statements/the-impact-of-pornography-on-children>

According to an article from The Bark Team date January 30, 2023:

“Here are just a few of the effects porn has on young brains:

- **Porn alters the structure and development of immature brains.** Studies show that porn can [damage a developing prefrontal cortex](#). The area of your brain is critical for decision-making and impulse control—when damaged, children are more likely to act impulsive and make rash decisions. Porn can also damage the dopamine reward system, making it more difficult to find excitement or fulfillment in healthy relationships.
- **Viewing porn skews reality thanks to mirror neurons.** Dr. Sharon Cooper, a forensic pediatrician and faculty member at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine, argues that children are more vulnerable to pornographic images than adults because of [mirror neurons in the brain](#). Mirror neurons play an important role in how children learn and convince people that they are actually experiencing what they see. Because these observed encounters seem so real to children, they are likely to believe this is how sex and relationships work in the real world—when that’s often far from the truth.
- **Mainstream porn normalizes and reinforces sexist ideas and harmful gender roles.** Experts say that [by age 10, gender stereotypes are established](#) in the minds of children. Considering the average age kids are exposed to porn is between 9-11 years old, much of what they see can be cemented into their long-lasting ideas on gender roles. Unfortunately, these images aren’t usually positive. A study of adolescent porn use concluded that the [major messages presented by porn](#) are male domination, hypermasculinity and making male sexual pleasure the top priority. These stereotypes, when

pushed to the extreme, as they often are in porn, include men being dominating, unemotional and controlling and women being submissive, emotional and weak. When acted upon, these gender stereotypes can lead to an increase in violent and risky behavior for boys and depression and exposure to violence for girls.

The Dangers of Porn

The effects of porn on the brain can lead to real dangers and damages in the present and long term. Surveys show that the earlier children are exposed to porn, the more likely they will regularly view it and experience more of its effects and dangers.

Here are a few of the potential dangers that come from early exposure to porn:

- **Porn can keep people from forming and maintaining healthy relationships.** Because porn skews children's view of what a normal relationship, sexually and otherwise, looks like, they are often bound to expect things that aren't reasonable or healthy from their partner. When these expectations aren't met or enforced without consent, one or both sides of the relationship will fail.

Sexual violence is perpetuated by porn. A review of mainstream porn has shown that [physical aggression occurred in 88.2% of scenes and verbal aggression in 48.7%](#). Men committed 70.3% of all aggressive acts and 94.4% of aggression was directed toward women. This repetitive reinforcement of gender stereotypes, violence and a male-centered narrative in pornography can lead to an increase in sexual violence toward women in the future.

- **Brains that have been rewired by viewing porn can lead to poor decision-making.** In relationships and beyond, desensitization to high dopamine levels can make even the highest-best moments a little less

exciting. Plus, increased impulsivity means that when important decisions are to be made, people are more likely to jump to conclusions than make an informed decision.”

<https://www.bark.us/blog/porn-dangers-damages/>

I could have listed many more citations, but I felt like this was certainly enough for all of you to get the idea of how dangerous obscene pornographic, inappropriate material is for minor children. In my research, I have not seen any website or other resource where there were positive outcomes from minor children being exposed to pornographic material.

Therefore, I implore you to **SUPPORT** this bill and keep this pornographic material away from our children. Their futures depend on you doing so.

Thank you for your courtesy and cooperation.”

SB0738 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: William Love

Position: UNF

I'm Bill Love of 490 Fairoak Dr, Severna Park MD

Concerning SB0738: Freedom to Read Act

THIS SHOULD BE RENAMED TO "KID'S FREEDOM TO READ PORNO ACT".

Seriously? This is an actual bill? STOP GROOMING OUR CHILDREN!

With this bill, teachers & librarians get a free pass to show obscene material to minors. That is totally unacceptable and morally repugnant. Vote unfavorably to this child grooming trash bill.

Thank you

SB0738-EEE_MACo_LOI.pdf

Uploaded by: Brianna January

Position: INFO



Senate Bill 738
Freedom to Read Act

MACo Position:

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Date: February 23, 2024

To: Education, Energy, and the
Environment Committee

From: Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) offers the following **LETTER OF INFORMATION** regarding SB 738. SB 738 creates “State Standards for Libraries” about providing and restricting library materials based on origin, identity, and “partisan doctrinal disapproval.” Under the bill, local library and school systems are required to adopt similar policies. Should a public library system fail to do so or if they violate the Standards, the State is authorized under SB 738 to withhold state funding from the public library system.

Making state funding contingent upon the policy and actions of library systems, and in some cases their individual personnel, gives counties pause. In such an event, which is effectively outside the county government’s sphere of control or oversight, a potential for stark service depletion would arise.

Assuming that county governments would be obligated – if not by law, then by public pressure – to fill any lapses in state funding resulting from the bill, counties could be forced to take on a substantial fiscal burden to maintain the library system’s level of service. County governments would be forced to backfill the loss of state funding despite having no authorization over library materials, resources, or programmatic policies.

Moreover, this would come as Maryland's counties face an unprecedented wave of fiscal effects. Revenues are softening – and are even in decline – as federal support recedes from the national economy and high-interest rates slow real estate sales. Costs of workforce, construction, and legal liability are all mounting dramatically. Additionally, the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future poses costs for education that, for each county, will absorb or exceed their projected new revenues from current sources. Furthermore, county options for generating meaningful revenues are limited, with most counties already at the state's income tax rate cap, leaving the regressive property tax as the principal remaining alternative. Placing new operational or fiscal burdens on county governments in this precarious setting is untenable and unrealistic.

Counties stand ready to contribute to discussions to refine and improve SB 738 if the Committee seeks to advance this legislation.