

**Testimony for the "Display of Obscene Material to Minors - Prohibition" hearing -
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Testimony:

SB0355 purports to protect minors from obscene materials. But what it really does is hand a blunt instrument to the inorganic groups proliferating today, groups that under the guise of freedom are pushing a "book banning" agenda that targets viewpoints and communities they don't like, in particular LGBTQ+ youth. The end result of this bill will be that these anti-LGBTQ+ groups will enter school libraries and with faux outrage claim that books with LGBTQ+ characters and themes contain obscene descriptions of illicit sex. They'll completely ignore the prong of the definition of obscene that says the work as a whole must lack serious artistic or literary value, because their goal will not be to engage in good-faith evaluation of materials that minors have access to but instead to attack and to delegitimize the LGBTQ+ community, to diminish its voices, to wipe away its stories.

By adding Public Schools to this section of the Maryland Criminal Code, this bill will open the floodgates. It will have a chilling effect, which we can presume is precisely the point. School Principals, fearing criminal liability, will likely choose to preemptively remove and then avoid LGBTQ+ books rather than invite endless chaos, distraction, litigation, and prosecution. This will leave LGBTQ+ students without representation in literature, without access to stories that offer them validation and acceptance and love. Our youth deserve better. I urge you to reject this unnecessary and unkind bill.