



Maryland Youth Advisory Council  
c/o Governor's Office of Crime  
Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services  
100 Community Place,  
Crownsville, MD 21032

Grace Minakowski, *Chair*  
Will O'Donnell, *Vice-Chair*  
Folashade Epebinu, *Secretary*

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March 27, 2024

**Re: SB 738** | Freedom to Read Act

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council prides itself on being a coalition of diverse young advocates and leaders who serve as a voice for youth in the state of Maryland. As leaders in our communities, and as appointees of the Governor, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, Maryland Association of Student Councils, Maryland Higher Education Commission and the University System of Maryland, we take every opportunity to address relevant issues by influencing legislation, spreading public awareness and serving as a liaison between youth and policymakers regarding issues facing youth.

Learning about the diverse communities surrounding students is a requisite for youth to adequately advance in society, and a core way of addressing this need is through literature. For students in rural or remote areas, access to public libraries and broad resources can be unreliable, hindering them from reaching their full academic potential. As a result, these students receive fewer resources simply based on their location, leading to decreased knowledge about various communities, cultures, and the general world around them. Supporting students' academic and social growth is a crucial function of libraries, lending resources to allow our youth to better navigate their lives. Maryland holds the responsibility to create a society where students have access to quality libraries, ones with adept facilities and strong resources available for students to excel. As we continue to see the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on our youths' education, and as students continue to underperform in reading and math assessments<sup>1</sup>. Maryland must take action to combat these pitfalls.

Various book bans across the nation neglect the need for students to inform themselves about themselves and their surroundings. While students in Maryland should feel safe with the materials available, they should not be confined to learning information from only one perspective, and must instead be exposed to various types of literature from different communities in Maryland. In Maryland, students have faced pushback from school systems for the education they desire and deserve, for example, Carroll County's Board of Education passed a policy to take books—which reflect the diverse communities of Maryland—off shelves across the county. Without exposure to diverse literature, our students of Maryland will be learning about their world from a narrow tunnel, hindering their growth as students and young adults.

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<sup>1</sup> Rakowski, Lora. 2022. "Maryland's Scores Reflect Nationwide Learning Loss Trends in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)." News.maryland.gov. Maryland State Department of Education. October 24, 2022.

<https://news.maryland.gov/msde/marylands-scores-reflect-nationwide-learning-loss-trends-in-national-assessment-of-educational-progress-naep/>.



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**SB 738** requires each county board of education to abide by a certain standard for library up-keep and develop standards for addressing objections to materials. **SB 738** ensures that any removal of material is done so to ensure the protection of students, rather than to harm their academic experience by focusing on divisive topics, which are still a necessary component to ensure holistic development. The Council supports **SB 738**, as it aligns with the Council's Legislative Platform supporting:

- a. Funding for and full utilization of up-to-date technology and educational resources for the Classroom. (Article II. Education; Clause C)

**SB 738** represents a pivotal step towards ensuring the establishment of library systems that are properly supported, and addresses the need to represent the different facets of Maryland. By pushing for the development of strong, diverse, and funded libraries, we support the educational journey of every student in Maryland, rightfully protecting their future. For these reasons, the Council supports **SB 738** and respectfully requests a favorable report from the committee. We thank you for your consideration of our position.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "G. Minakowski", written in a cursive style.

Grace Minakowski, Chair  
Maryland Youth Advisory Council