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TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF HB1385, Parental Rights in Education
2/18/2025
TO: Chair Atterbeary and members of the Ways and Means Committee
FROM: Ayla Hurley

Chair Atterbeary and members of the committee, my name is Ayla Hurley and I've resided in Maryland my entire life. HB1385 is described as: *“Requiring each county board of education, in consultation with **certain individuals**, to develop and implement a **certain policy** to promote parental involvement in students' education; and establishing a complaint and appeals process for violations of a **certain policy**.”* Who are these “certain individuals” going to be? Will these be people who understand that representation of different ways of being is vital to childrens’ well-being and positive sense of self?

What is this “certain policy?” As written, this smacks of a way for restrictive bans promoted by limited minds to remove “woke” “DEI” materials - words that mean something, but not what their colloquial use has warped them into - from childrens’ ability to access them. But banning a book, or reading a book for that matter, does not *change* a child’s identity. Children have a right to their own education, and to see themselves, who they already are, reflected in their educational material. According to Heather Rose Artushin, LISW-CP (“Why Book Bans Are Bad for Mental Health,” <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/well-read/202405/why-book-bans-are-bad-for-mental-health>):

“Research supports that book bans are bad for mental health, especially impacting:

1. Marginalized individuals whose stories are contained in the majority of challenged books. Research shows that people of color are at a higher risk of facing mental health issues, and have increased barriers to accessing mental health treatment, due to institutional and interpersonal discrimination, stigma, and socioeconomic barriers (Williams DR., 2018). LGBTQIA+ individuals are nearly three times more likely to develop a mental health disorder, like depression or anxiety, and some studies indicate that nearly 45% of LGBTQIA+ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the last year (The Trevor Project, 2022). Banning books about the lived experiences and histories of marginalized groups of people only serve to increase feelings of exclusion and invisibility, and intensify their risk of mental health issues (Pickering, G., 2023).

2. Children and teens suffer when books are banned in their schools and public libraries for many reasons. As young people are in a developmental period of identity formation with a strong focus on peer relationships, banning diverse books robs them of the opportunity to have an open dialogue and engage in critical thinking in a safe, supportive environment (Pfeifer JH, Berkman ET., 2018). Youth are likely to seek information elsewhere, from unmonitored, unsafe sources, without the support of trusted adults.”

When these “certain policies” written by “certain individuals” cannot even be named in the legislation, that strikes me as disingenuous, and not the kind of vague language I want for children in Maryland to have to contend with. Parents already have options to opt-out of certain sensitive material due to religious objections, and this feels like a major stretch of that right. Parents who want to fully control their children’s educational material have every opportunity to homeschool.

For the mental health and safety, and just plain old joy of representation, of our school children, please do not pass this bill. Thank you.