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TESTIMONY ON HB#/0785 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Freedom to Read Act

TO: Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and members of the Ways and Means 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 HB#/0785, Freedom to Read Act

This bill is 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 HB#/0785.**

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