



**House Bill 785
Freedom to Read Act
February 21, 2024
Support**

Dear Chair Atterbary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee,

Advance Maryland strongly supports HB785, which aims to establish new state library standards and improve the standards across all Maryland libraries. As libraries have come under attack recently, it is more essential than ever that all libraries throughout the state provide outstanding service to our communities. At Advance Maryland, we work towards a Maryland with thriving, healthy and inclusive communities where all Marylanders have access to opportunity, including safe and affordable housing; economic prosperity; quality healthcare; reliable transportation; a restorative justice system; and a livable future.

All literature, including books that touch on sexual themes, play a crucial role in fostering well-rounded and informed students and citizens. Literature allows people to see diverse experiences, perspectives, and challenges that individuals may encounter in their lives. But books have come under attack, particularly those in school libraries. It is of utmost importance that libraries be protected from political attacks and continue to provide books which allow exposure to different narratives, helping them learn about the adult world in a safe setting and also increasing their ability to empathize with the experiences of others.

According to librarians, new book reviewal standards in Carroll County school libraries will decrease book access. Books, including nonfiction and cookbooks, cannot be purchased for high schools, with no exceptions. There have been removal requests in Carroll, Wicomico, Worcester, Calvert, Somerset and Baltimore counties. In Carroll County, 56 books are temporarily removed. Often, books targeting LGBTQ+ issues are targeted, removing representation for a group already with little representation. All this will surely decrease the quality of libraries and hamper the intellectual development of students. It is essential that the state set standards and give teeth to the appropriate agencies to enforce standards to ensure that all students in all parts of the state have adequate access to books.

As our libraries, especially school libraries, have come under attack, it is important to set standards to our libraries and not let attacks hamper quality of services. Advance Maryland strongly urges the committee to issue a favorable report.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Alice Wilkerson
Executive Director

Testimony written by Tanish Gupta, Advance Maryland Intern