

HB 785: Freedom to Read Act: Please OPPOSE this bill!!

Dear Ways and Means Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and all other esteemed Committee Members:

I urge you to think carefully before voting on this bill. This is important legislation that will affect all of our children.

Part of the bill states:

"...IT IS THE GOAL OF THE STATE THAT EACH LIBRARY IS OPERATED IN A MANNER THAT RECOGNIZES THE FOLLOWING STANDARDS:

LIBRARY MATERIALS, SERVICES, AND RESOURCES EXIST AND SHOULD BE PROVIDED FOR THE INTEREST, INFORMATION, AND ENLIGHTENMENT OF ALL PERSONS THE LIBRARY SERVES;

This is very broad language for what types of materials would be put in front of our children. I can only imagine that each and every one of you, especially those of you that are parents, would like a diverse variety of materials to be available for our children to be able to access to help them in their school studies. I would also imagine that those of you that are parents would not like inappropriate materials to be available to our children to distract them from their studies while in school and at home.

Therefore, I implore to vote against this bill as it is currently written. The language in this bill is too vague as it is currently written to protect our children from inappropriate materials that have no scholastic application for our children to enhance their studies. As I'm sure you are aware, there are currently pornographic and obscene materials in our school libraries that do not in any way add any scholastic value to our children; they do not enhance the academic subjects that our students are studying. The language in this bill does not account for any pornographic or obscene materials being placed in our school libraries and being available to our children. These types of materials are inappropriate in a learning environment, whether they are inappropriate for a child's age or for the subject matter or for the pictures or other visual media, etc. Simply put, pornographic or obscene material should NOT be available to our children in our public school libraries!!

I am including a copy of written testimony I submitted for Senate Bill 355: Criminal Law - Display of Obscene Material to Minors - Prohibition. There are links and sources within this testimony that show how damaging pornographic and obscene material to the brains and mental health of children.

Thank you for your courtesy and cooperation in OPPOSING this dangerous bill.

Trudy Tibbals

A Very Concerned Mother and Maryland resident

P.S. Here is my testimony for Senate Bill 355: **Criminal Law - Display of Obscene Material to Minors - Prohibition.**

"Regardless of your political affiliation, I think we can all agree that pornographic, obscene, inappropriate material, whatever term you want to use, is very damaging to minor children! Here are a few objective resources and their citations.

"Pornographic content can harm children. Exposure to pornography at a young age may lead to poor mental health, sexism and objectification, sexual violence, and other negative outcomes. Among other risks, when children view pornography that portrays abusive and misogynistic acts, they may come to view such behaviour as normal and acceptable."

<https://www.unicef.org/harmful-content-online#:~:text=Pornographic%20content%20can%20harm%20children&text=Exposure%20to%20pornography%20at%20a,violence%2C%20and%20other%20negative%20outcomes.>

"Consumption of pornography is associated with many negative emotional, psychological, and physical health outcomes. These include increased rates of depression, anxiety, acting out and violent behavior, younger age of sexual debut, sexual promiscuity, increased risk of teen pregnancy, and a distorted view of relationships between men and women. For adults, pornography results in an increased likelihood of divorce which is also harmful to children. The American College of Pediatricians urges healthcare professionals to communicate the risks of pornography use to patients and their families and to offer resources both to protect children from viewing pornography and to treat individuals suffering from its negative effects...

Sexual predators have purposefully exposed young children to pornography for the purpose of grooming the children for sexual exploitation.<sup>14</sup> Pornography exposure at these young ages often results in anxiety for the child.<sup>15</sup> Children also report feelings of disgust, shock, embarrassment, anger, fear, and sadness after viewing pornography.<sup>16</sup> These children can suffer all of the symptoms of anxiety and depression. They may become obsessed with acting out adult sexual acts that they have seen, and this can be very disruptive and disturbing to the child's peers who witness or are victimized by this behavior. Children under twelve years old who have viewed pornography are statistically more likely to sexually assault their peers.<sup>17</sup> In sum, children exposed to pornographic material are at risk for a broad range of maladaptive behaviors and psychopathology...

There is evidence that society's acceptance of pornography creates unique problems for women. The use of pornography can result in violent and sexually aggressive attitudes towards women. Men who consume pornography are more likely to adopt rape myth ideology, which is that women cause rape or actually enjoy rape or sexual assault...

Pornography use by adolescents and young adults often leads to a distorted view of sexuality and its role in fostering healthy personal relationships. These distortions include the overestimation of the prevalence of sexual activity in the community, the belief that sexual promiscuity is normal, and the belief that sexual abstinence is unhealthy.<sup>34</sup> These perspectives are likely to make it more difficult for young people to form lasting, meaningful relationships with the opposite sex, which will ultimately result in more anxiety, depression, and overall life dissatisfaction...

Children suffer many negative effects due to modern society's exposure to and acceptance of pornography. These negative effects include mental disturbance and unrest for the young school age child, including acting out and violent behavior. Because of its harmfulness to children, pornography must never be used as a tool to teach children human sexuality. For older adolescents and young adults,

pornography teaches a false narrative regarding human sexuality and how men and women form healthy sexual relationships. This makes it more difficult for young men and women to form authentic, stable relationships. For parents, pornography is divisive resulting in a decreased quality of marriage and increasing the likelihood of divorce and separation which has been well documented to be harmful to children...”

<https://acpeds.org/position-statements/the-impact-of-pornography-on-children>

According to an article from The Bark Team date January 30, 2023:

**“Here are just a few of the effects porn has on young brains:**

- **Porn alters the structure and development of immature brains.** Studies show that porn can [damage a developing prefrontal cortex](#). The area of your brain is critical for decision-making and impulse control—when damaged, children are more likely to act impulsive and make rash decisions. Porn can also damage the dopamine reward system, making it more difficult to find excitement or fulfillment in healthy relationships.
- **Viewing porn skews reality thanks to mirror neurons.** Dr. Sharon Cooper, a forensic pediatrician and faculty member at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine, argues that children are more vulnerable to pornographic images than adults because of [mirror neurons in the brain](#). Mirror neurons play an important role in how children learn and convince people that they are actually experiencing what they see. Because these observed encounters seem so real to children, they are likely to believe this is how sex and relationships work in the real world—when that’s often far from the truth.
- **Mainstream porn normalizes and reinforces sexist ideas and harmful gender roles.** Experts say that [by age 10, gender stereotypes are established](#) in the minds of children. Considering the average age kids are exposed to porn is between 9-11 years old, much of what they see can be cemented into their long-lasting ideas on gender roles. Unfortunately, these images aren’t usually positive. A study of adolescent porn use concluded that the [major messages presented by porn](#) are male domination, hypermasculinity and making male sexual pleasure the top priority. These stereotypes, when pushed to the extreme, as they often are in porn, include men being

dominating, unemotional and controlling and women being submissive, emotional and weak. When acted upon, these gender stereotypes can lead to an increase in violent and risky behavior for boys and depression and exposure to violence for girls.

## The Dangers of Porn

The effects of porn on the brain can lead to real dangers and damages in the present and long term. Surveys show that the earlier children are exposed to porn, the more likely they will regularly view it and experience more of its effects and dangers.

**Here are a few of the potential dangers that come from early exposure to porn:**

- **Porn can keep people from forming and maintaining healthy relationships.** Because porn skews children's view of what a normal relationship, sexually and otherwise, looks like, they are often bound to expect things that aren't reasonable or healthy from their partner. When these expectations aren't met or enforced without consent, one or both sides of the relationship will fail.

**Sexual violence is perpetuated by porn.** A review of mainstream porn has shown that [physical aggression occurred in 88.2% of scenes and verbal aggression in 48.7%](#). Men committed 70.3% of all aggressive acts and 94.4% of aggression was directed toward women. This repetitive reinforcement of gender stereotypes, violence and a male-centered narrative in pornography can lead to an increase in sexual violence toward women in the future.

- **Brains that have been rewired by viewing porn can lead to poor decision-making.** In relationships and beyond, desensitization to high dopamine levels can make even the highest-best moments a little less exciting. Plus, increased impulsivity means that when important decisions are

to be made, people are more likely to jump to conclusions than make an informed decision.”

<https://www.bark.us/blog/porn-dangers-damages/>

I could have listed many more citations, but I felt like this was certainly enough for all of you to get the idea of how dangerous obscene pornographic, inappropriate material is for minor children. In my research, I have not seen any website or other resource where there were positive outcomes from minor children being exposed to pornographic material.

Therefore, I implore you to **SUPPORT** this bill and keep this pornographic material away from our children. Their futures depend on you doing so.

Thank you for your courtesy and cooperation.”