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Unfavorable Testimony on Bill HB0025: Public Schools – Sexually Explicit Materials – Prohibited in Libraries and Media Centers

January 29, 2024

Chair Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Vice Chair Jheanelle K. Wilkins, and esteemed members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I write to you today as nonbinary adult invested in the well-being of Montgomery County's LGBTQIA+ community, and as a parent of two children aged 11 and 16. **My testimony is unfavorable, and I urge you to vote against this harmful bill.**

HB0025 opens a window to censorship of literature that is vital to the growth of all of Maryland's school children. The bill is also likely to cause irreparable harm to Maryland's LGBTQIA+ youth.

Language included in the bill makes it quite clear that it is targeted to banning materials that contain positive descriptions and illustrations of LGBTQIA+ youth and/or their LGBTQIA+ family members. Our country has seen bills like this throughout it's states, counties and municipalities.

Don't let the bill's final text fool you. It claims to assign responsibility to county boards to determine what kinds of material they will exclude from their school libraries, as well as literature, history, and family life classes. This does not limit the dangerous impact towards LGBTQIA+ youth across the state of Maryland.

As my children were growing up, we had to purchase books that accurately described their family. Examples of the books we have purchased are Robie Harris's "It's Not the Stork," "It's Perfectly Normal," and "Sex is a Funny Word;" Cory Silverberg's "What Makes a Baby;" and Kacen Callendar's "Felix Ever After." Each of these books are indeed age appropriate and written by experts in their fields, and in some cases by the LGBTQIA+ community itself. They contain illustrations, and not photographs.

My kids are lucky. Their parents have the disposable income to spend money on books that go above and beyond what is provided in their pre-K, elementary, middle and secondary schools. We also support them in their quest to understand all sorts of people - regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

That is not the same for all of Maryland's children and youth. Please don't let children grow up believing that their families, friends, and/or bodies are abnormal or weird. When I was young in the 1980s and 1990s books such as the above were not available. I became a questioning youth

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not certain of my sexual orientation and even more unsure of what a transgender identity might look like. If I had access to materials such as these available to me outside of my home, I would not have grown up to be the depressed and suicidal youth that I was.

I urge the Ways and Means committee to vote unfavorably on bill HB0025, preventing the bill from moving out of committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ezra Towne', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ezra Towne
District 18