



**FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT**  
**OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE**

Jessica Fitzwater  
*County Executive*

**HB 785 – Freedom to Read Act**

**DATE:** February 21, 2024  
**COMMITTEE:** House Ways and Means Committee  
**POSITION:** Favorable  
**FROM:** The Office of Frederick County Executive Jessica Fitzwater

As the County Executive of Frederick County, I urge the committee to give HB 785 – Freedom to Read Act a favorable report.

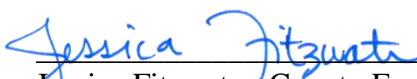
This bill will establish State standards for libraries, including prohibiting the removal of library materials, books and other resources based on an author or creator’s background, origin, or opinions or based on “partisan or doctrinal disapproval” of the contents. The bill will also protect librarians from losing employment for following such standards.

Nationally, we are seeing efforts to remove books from schools and libraries because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval. Oftentimes, these materials are simply sharing stories about families and characters of all walks of life – stories that should be available to our communities. According to the American Library Association (ALA), attempts to censor library materials increased by 20% from 2022 to 2023. Most of the challenges were to books written by or about a person of color or a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. When attacks on books such as these prevail, we not only limit the ability of our community to understand and learn about the world around them, but we also signal to people of color and LGBTQIA+ individuals that their humanity and experiences are unimportant or shameful.

As a 17-year educator and a mother to two avid readers, I know the importance of having access to books and library materials that tell all kinds of stories from broad, diverse perspectives.

HB 785 is crucial to protecting our librarians and the books within our libraries regardless of their subject matter. This bill aims to do so by tying library funding to following the established State standards of protecting all library content. By creating a penalty for violating one’s right to read, it is our hope that we can protect our right to library materials and the wellbeing of our librarians.

Thank you for your consideration of HB 785. I urge you to advance this bill with a favorable report.

  
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Jessica Fitzwater, County Executive  
Frederick County, MD