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February 21, 2024

TO: The Honorable Vanessa Atterbary  
Chair, Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Adam Spangler  
Legislative Aide, Legislative Affairs, Office of the Attorney General

RE: House Bill 785 - Freedom to Read Act - **Support**

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The Office of the Attorney General requests a favorable report on Delegate Dana Jones' House Bill 785 - Freedom to Read Act. House Bill 785, the Freedom to Read Act, seeks to accomplish several actions which will protect Maryland Libraries and its workers.

House Bill 785 (HB785) will establish a set of State Standards for Libraries that enshrines into law that Library materials exist and should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all persons that the Maryland library serves. HB785 further establishes that a library should not exclude material from its catalog because of the origin, background, or views of a person who created the material, and that a library should not proscribe or remove material from its catalog because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

HB785 also requires Maryland libraries, school libraries, resources centers, and any other libraries to adopt and follow a written policy consistent with these standards. Additionally, HB785 will protect school and public library workers by preventing punitive actions being taken against them for their adherence to the standards. Finally, this legislation will protect all the

public library collections from planned attempts to take or damage materials by increasing fines for offenders.

Maryland Libraries have seen a 133% increase in formal challenges to their collections, and a 263% increase in informal challenges.<sup>1</sup> In a September 2023 survey by the Maryland Association of School Librarians (MASL), 74% of respondents reported book challenges at their schools.<sup>2</sup> The MASL survey also found that 52% of school librarians reported that book challenges have made their job more difficult and 42% said book challenges have had a negative impact on their personal lives and/or interactions in their communities.<sup>3</sup>

Marylanders should not be kept from learning about the realities of our world because a small vocal few who disagree with who an author is, who they love, or who they worship. Marylanders deserve to see themselves reflected in the books they read, the art they see, and the history they learn. Maryland's library collection allows our readers to become critical thinkers, exposed to ideas that they may disagree with, proud of what our nation has overcome, and thoughtful about what comes next.

House Bill 785 will safeguard Maryland libraries from becoming the next frontier of censorship, protecting literature and the freedom for readers to choose for themselves.

For the foregoing reasons, the Office of the Attorney General requests a favorable report on House Bill 785.

cc: The Honorable Dana Jones  
Ways & Means Committee Members

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<sup>1</sup> Book Challenge Survey, MSLA, Retrieved 2.16.24

<sup>2</sup> Maryland Book Challenge Impact Survey, MASL, 10.10.23

<sup>3</sup> *I.D.*