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BILL NO.: **HB 785**

TITLE: Freedom to Read Act

SPONSOR: Delegate Jones

COMMITTEE: Ways and Means

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

DATE: February 21, 2024

Baltimore County **SUPPORTS** House Bill 785 – Freedom to Read Act. This legislation protects the right to read for all Marylanders. Specifically, HB 785 spells out professional standards that all libraries abide by, it puts fiscal penalties in place for libraries who do not follow these standards, and it protects librarians from retaliation, loss of employment or punishment when they are acting in a manner consistent with these standards. Furthermore, it puts a penalty in place for customers who deliberately check out books and hold on to them for the express purpose of keeping them out of the hands of others, a form of censorship.

An alarming trend of book banning in public and school libraries has been taking place across the Country. Carroll County has, for example, restricted access to books deemed “sexually explicit” in its school libraries. The data shows that book banning has reached unprecedented levels in recent years. Book banning denies library users and reader access to books that foster learning and critical thinking, and is fundamentally undemocratic. Libraries exist to provide access to materials that reflect broad perspectives and to serve diverse audiences. It is not acceptable for any one person or group to deny access to literature for everyone else. Banning books in our public libraries is regressive and in our democratic society we must move towards including, not excluding, diverse perspectives.

Accordingly, Baltimore County urges a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 785 from the House Ways and Means committee. For more information, please contact Jenn Aiosa, Director of Government Affairs at jaiosa@baltimorecountymd.gov.