



Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
Delegate Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Vice-Chair
Ways and Means Committee
Room 131, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

February 19, 2024

Dear Delegate Atterbeary, Delegate Wilkins, and members of the Committee:

I would like to express my support for **HB 785: Freedom to Read Act** as a sadly necessary piece of legislation in a time of unprecedented attacks on intellectual freedom.

Librarians care about their communities. A lot. I am personally very proud of what we do – we try hard, every day, to make a difference to people and treasure the stories of when we demonstrably do. Libraries take the resources entrusted to us and make them as broadly available to our community as a whole as we can, and we do so fundamentally to promote Library values: values such as equal access for all, intellectual freedom, lifelong learning, fostering democracy, diversity, stewardship of public resources and collaboration. We collect materials widely so as to have something for everyone, regardless of background or interests. Many of these materials I personally disagree with, but they remain, just as they should.

And yet those values are under attack from fringe elements trying to push their personal beliefs on society as a whole, trying to squelch with the force of law people and ideas they disagree with. For the last several years, library staff have had to serve the public with the increasing threat of censorship attempts, personal abuse, disciplinary action or termination – simply for upholding the fundamental values of the profession. This bill affirms the State's willingness to stand for the interests of the public as a whole, rather than a few loud and angry self-appointed moral guardians. This bill ensures that good people will not be punished for following Library principles in the face of censorship efforts. And finally, this bill will help protect the community's materials from theft, which would-be censors often resort to when they know their efforts at control over others will fail.

It's not a librarian's job to decide what people are and aren't allowed to read, and it most definitely isn't anyone else's either. Those who covet that role the most are the ones who should be least trusted with it.

Thank you once again for your ongoing support of Maryland's libraries.

Sincerely,

Thomas Vose

Director, Ruth Enlow Library of Garrett County