

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins and honorable committee members,

Thank you for providing this opportunity to express support for House Bill 0785, the Freedom to Read Act as sponsored by Delegate Dana Jones. As a school librarian in Anne Arundel County Public Schools over the past twenty years, I have served students from grades K-12 and seen our student population become increasingly diverse. To meet their needs, I have purchased materials and books that reflect who these students are along with materials that support curriculum. To purchase these items, the county school system has a clear policy to ensure that professionals like myself curate books and materials that are age-appropriate, high quality and promote literacy and curricular goals.

Unfortunately, over the past few years there have been voices in parts of the country and even in the state of Maryland that have successfully sought to remove school library books that they might not agree with. In many cases these books deal with topics of gender and race. These groups of people often indicate that it important parents have a 'say' in their children's education. That is fine. However, what is not fine is preventing other children from accessing age-appropriate books that have already gone through a professional approval process. All kids need to be able to see themselves in literature from picture books to young adult novels. By voting for HB 0785, you will ensure that Maryland students will have access to books in which they can be truly represented.

Thank you.

Timothy Swann