

WASHINGTON COUNTY
FREE LIBRARY

Where People & Possibilities Meet

February 21, 2024

Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chairman
Ways and Means Committee
Room 131, House Office Building

Dear Chairman Delegate Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Committee Members,

As the Chairman of the Washington County Free Library Board of Trustees, I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for the **Freedom to Read Act (HB 785)** currently under consideration. I believe that this bill represents a crucial step in safeguarding the fundamental principles of intellectual freedom and access to information for all citizens.

The Freedom to Read Act establishes essential State standards for libraries that receive funding from the State of Maryland. The bill's commitment to ensuring that library materials, services, and resources are provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all individuals we serve is to be commended. By emphasizing that libraries should not exclude or remove materials based on the origin, background, or views of their creators, the bill upholds the core principles of intellectual freedom and diversity of thought.

The Freedom to Read Act also prohibits retaliatory actions against library employees who act in accordance with the state standards, ensuring that staff members can fulfill their professional duties without fear of reprisal. Additionally, the bill outlines necessary actions to address instances of vandalism, theft, or destruction of library property, providing essential protections for our community collections.

It is essential to highlight what this bill does and does not entail:

What this bill does:

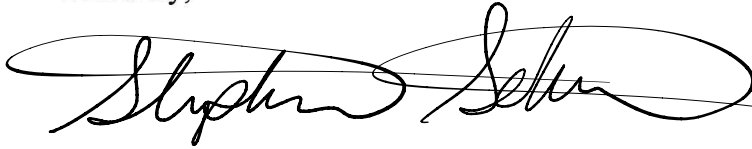
- Establishes principles for curating a responsible library collection
- Protects community collections from deliberate theft
- Safeguards libraries and library staff from unwarranted penalization for adhering to organizational policies and procedures
- Codifies Maryland's values of access for all people

What this bill does not do:

- Dictate specific topics or titles that must be included in library collections
- Permit obscene or pornographic material in library collections
- Mandate individuals to borrow items they find objectionable
- Commit Maryland to a standard or set of principles outlined by external organizations such as the American Library Association

In conclusion, the Freedom to Read Act is a vital piece of legislation that aligns with the Washington County Free Library's commitment to providing equitable access to information and protecting the principles of intellectual freedom. I urge you to support this bill and ensure its passage for the benefit of our communities and the continued vitality of our public libraries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Schutte", written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line that extends to the right.

Stephen Schutte
Chairman, Board of Trustees
Washington County Free Library and Western Maryland Regional Library