

January 29, 2024

Re: Oppose HB25 – Public Schools - Sexually Explicit Materials - Prohibited in Libraries and Media Centers

To Whom It May Concern:

As a social worker, constituent, and community member residing in the state of Maryland, I am writing to you to request that you **oppose** the proposed House bill: Public Schools - Sexually Explicit Materials - Prohibited in Libraries and Media Centers ([HB25](#)).

This proposed bill mimics the larger wave of censorship that effectively limits access to written and educational materials within library and media centers. Such overly broad efforts are anti-LGBTQIA+ in nature and routinely target and seek to erase content that intersects with identity, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression under the guise that such content is *not age-appropriate or sexually explicit in nature*.

Furthermore, such proposed bills not only place undue financial and labor burdens on already taxed library and media centers, but they also seek effectively co-opt the professional roles of the staff serving in these capacities by forcing them to police and censor content at the expense of adhering to their own professional code of conduct.

As stated in the American Library Association's [Library Bill of Rights](#): *Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment*. Thus, it is essential that educationally based public spaces like libraries and media centers provide welcoming and inclusive spaces for all people, family systems, and populations. Furthermore, it is critical that such spaces provide accurate and evidence-based information to the general public that is free of state-based censorship efforts.

Censorship and erasure remain among the most harmful forms of social control. In her work *The Librarian of Burned Books*, author and writer Brianna Labuskes wrote: *"I can tell you that banning books, burning books, blocking books is often used as a way to erase people, a belief system, or culture."* The HB25 bill seeks to do just that – to characterize inclusive, evidence-based educational content (especially content that intersects with LGBTQIA+ people) as a threat to the well-being of children.

Failing to oppose bills like HB25 and endorsement of censorship in any form poses far greater harm to our Maryland communities. As a social worker, I am part of a profession that is committed to individual autonomy and self-determination. Such ethical concepts are predicated upon the knowledge that all individuals can and should be free to act, free to learn, and free to discern meaning without state-sanctioned coercion on such fundamental freedoms.

Respectfully,

Liam Westgate, MBA, MSW, LCSW-C