



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 785 – Freedom to Read Act

POSITION: Support

BY: Linda T. Kohn, President

Date: 21 February 2024

The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) is a nonpartisan organization that works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. At the 2020 LWVUS Convention, delegates voted to amend the LWVUS bylaws to include the League’s commitment to its [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion \(DEI\) Policy](#) in Article II as one of the foundational policies of the organization alongside the Political Policy (also referred to as the [Nonpartisan Policy](#)). The LWVMD is committed to collaborating with lawmakers and educational stakeholders to protecting the integrity of our library system while respecting the values of inclusivity, diversity, and intellectual freedom. HB 785 is consistent with those values.

LWVMD strongly supports HB 785 – Freedom to Read Act - because it establishes standards that will protect libraries and librarians from efforts to censor or otherwise remove certain materials from library shelves. Lawmakers across the nation are proposing and passing legislation to ban books in libraries and schools, including in Maryland.¹ This bill will counter those effort to ban books by requiring that libraries, the regional resource center, and cooperative service program in Maryland adhere to State standards for libraries or lose state funding. Importantly, it will protect librarians from retaliatory acts for doing their job. Efforts to ban books also target the most vulnerable in our society.

Banning books is the antithesis of a free and open democracy and a violation of our first amendment rights. It should not be tolerated. This bill will push back against efforts to limit our access to books by ensuring that access to books, materials, and resources are not restricted and librarians are not subject to retaliation simply for doing their job. This bill is an important step in protecting those rights.

We urge a favorable report on HB 785.

¹ Figueroa, A. & Ford, W. J. (October 5, 2023). First amendment advocates fight growing number of book bans. *Maryland Matters*. <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2023/10/05/first-amendment-advocates-fight-growing-number-of-book-bans/>