



LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

Bill: SB738/HB785 Freedom to Read Act

Organization: PFLAG Salisbury Inc., PO Box 5107, Salisbury Maryland 21802

Submitted by: Nicole Hollywood, Board Member

Position: **FAVORABLE**

SALISBURY PFLAG SUPPORTS THE FREEDOM TO READ

Greetings. My name is Nicole Hollywood. I am a professor in the University System of Maryland, a member of the Maryland Commission for LGBTQIA+ Affairs, a board member of PFLAG Salisbury, a resident of the Eastern Shore, and a parent. I am submitting this testimony in FAVOR of **SB738/HB785** The Freedom to Read Act on behalf of PFLAG Salisbury, the Salisbury, Maryland Chapter of PFLAG National.

Banning books is expensive and forces counties to divert crucial time and resources to address insidious efforts to curtail students' freedom to read, the result of which hurts students and communities. In a September release, the ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom reported that the number of unique titles challenged in the first 8 months of 2023 jumped 20% over 2022, with most of the challenges relating to books "written by or about a person of color or a member of the LGBTQIA+ community."

Inclusive storybooks advance interests in ensuring a safe, supportive environments in which all youth can thrive. At PFLAG Salisbury, we believe that youth need to read books and be exposed to curriculum that act as both mirrors (seeing their identities and experiences reflected) and windows (learning about others' identities and experiences.) This means that young people need to be able to see a reflection of themselves, but they also must be encouraged to see outwards and consider perspectives and experiences different from their own. The result of exposing young people to only insular and homogenous materials forces them to develop a skewed, inaccurate version of the diversity of our society that extends the disconnect and marginalization of underrepresented groups – particularly LGBTQIA+ youth and youth of color.

GLAAD explains "Book bans violate First Amendment rights, the rights of parents to decide what's best for their children, waste taxpayer money and resources, undermine the ability of teachers and librarians to effectively manage their classrooms and book collections, and above all, block the essential right of children to learn about themselves and the world while seeing themselves reflected in the pages of a book."

Salisbury PFLAG supports establishing State standards for libraries that receive funding from the State; altering the duties of the State Library Board, the State Library Agency, and regional resource centers to incorporate the State standards for libraries; making funding for libraries contingent on adoption of a written policy consistent with the State standards for libraries; requiring the State Librarian to authorize the State Comptroller to withhold funding from libraries under certain circumstances; prohibiting county boards of education and the governing bodies of certain libraries from retaliating against employees for acting in a manner consistent with the State standards for libraries; and etcetera. Therefore, PFLAG Salisbury Inc. supports the bill under consideration and recommends a FAVORABLE report in committee.