

Ways and Means Committee

HB 785 Freedom to Read Act

February 21, 2024

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

As a Maryland resident, I am writing to ask your favorable support for **HB 785 Freedom to Read Act**. This bill is crucial to preserving the freedom for students and library users to access information without interference from a vocal minority who wish to censor books because their ideologies do not agree with the subject matter of some library materials. The bill will do the following:

- Establish standards for the purchase of library materials
- Protects library materials from deliberate theft
- Protects library staff from retribution for simply doing their jobs as spelled out in the state standards and their library's policies and procedures
- Protects libraries that defend against unconstitutional attempts to censor collections and ban books

Despite the hyperbolic cries of censors who want to neuter library collections to fit their own narrow views of what defines "age appropriate", libraries do not collect obscene materials. This is a legal term, defined by the Supreme Court in the Miller case (1973), and HB 785 does not allow obscene or pornographic materials to be purchased for library collections. Nor does the bill dictate topics or titles that must be purchased by libraries, or force people to check out materials they find objectionable. Finally, HB 785 does not establish standards or principles dictated by groups or organizations outside of Maryland.

The bill simply codifies into law a requirement that libraries purchase materials that serve a diverse user base. HB 785 recognizes that it is imperative for ALL library users in the state of Maryland to be able to find materials that interest them, and that libraries contain materials in which they can see themselves and learn about other people and ideas.

Unfortunately, the past few years has seen an explosion of efforts across the country by organized groups and individuals who want to ban books from school and public libraries simply because the books contain issues and characters dealing with the LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities. States such as Texas and Florida have passed laws banning books using vague language that cannot clearly define subjective terms such as "age appropriate" or "sexually explicit." As leaders in the state of Maryland, I urge you to proactively defend the public's first amendment right to access information by recommending HB 785 for passage.

Respectfully,

Lloyd M. Jansen