

HB785

FAV

My name is Donna Mignardi, and I am president of the Maryland Association of School Librarians. I am also a school librarian. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB785/ SB738 also known as the Freedom to Read bill. This bill is an important step in the nationwide fight against censorship in both public and school libraries. The Freedom to Read Act establishes a foundation for school librarians to perform their essential work without fear of harassment or retribution, and ultimately, allows our libraries to be the hub of a vibrant inclusive learning environment.

In the last two years, we have watched as a politically motivated movement has repeatedly attempted, sometimes successfully, to remove books from the shelves of school libraries. Some of us, including me, thought this would never happen here in Maryland. But, then it did. Efforts at censoring and restricting access to a high-quality school library collection prevent school librarians from fulfilling a key duty – curating a robust, up-to-date collection that meets the needs of our students and the community. We take our collection development responsibilities seriously.

A recent survey of Maryland librarians conducted by the Maryland Association of School Librarians on book challenges and censorship in their districts, revealed that book challenges have become a statewide epidemic. And although we take our commitment of selecting and evaluating titles for our school library collections seriously, many librarians are fearful of job security and retribution for having diverse collections, and soft censorship is taking place. Soft censorship is just as detrimental to the intellectual freedom of the school community as is book

banning and unconstitutional censorship. Those that ban and censor information have never been on the right side of history.

The Maryland Association of School Librarians feels strongly that this legislation would: defend libraries and library staff from punitive actions for doing their jobs and adhering to the policies and procedures of their library and will uphold and ensure school boards also adhere to the professional policies of selection, evaluation, and review of library materials.

It is said that books in a school library collection should reflect the student community, like a mirror; at the same time, it should be a window through which students may learn about the wide and diverse world. Parents may of course decide what learning opportunities they wish their child to experience but no one person or group should decide the learning and reading experiences for all students. The Freedom to Read Act will reassert the constitutional principle that library materials are intended to be culturally responsive and inclusive of all individuals served by the library.

Thank you for supporting the freedom to read.

Donna Mignardi

Maryland Association of School Librarians, President