

HB 785  
FAV - Support

The Maryland Association of School Librarians stands in staunch support of the Freedom to Read Act, a critical piece of legislation aimed at preserving and promoting the fundamental principles of intellectual freedom and access to information in our state's libraries, including school libraries.

The Freedom to Read Act is not merely a bill; it is a beacon of liberty, guiding our libraries to operate in accordance with State standards that uphold the principles of intellectual freedom, diversity of thought, and unfettered access to information for all Marylanders.

This legislation is essential for establishing clear guidelines and expectations for libraries, including school libraries, that receive funding from the State. By incorporating State standards into their policies and practices, all libraries can ensure that they remain on the forefront of intellectual freedom, free from censorship or exclusion of materials based on their content or viewpoint. The bill requires libraries to have set policies and procedures for collection development, which is vital for allowing librarians in public, academic, and school libraries to create collections that meet the needs of their community.

Another crucial aspect of the Freedom to Read Act is its provision prohibiting retaliation against library employees for acting in a manner consistent with the State standards for libraries. This protection is vital for safeguarding the rights of library staff to uphold these principles without fear of reprisal or retaliation from their employers.

The Freedom to Read Act empowers the State Librarian to withhold funding from libraries that fail to comply with the State standards under certain circumstances. This accountability mechanism ensures that libraries are held accountable for their adherence to these fundamental principles and encourages them to prioritize the protection of intellectual freedom and access to information.

Additionally, by requiring certain actions involving the property of a library to be committed knowingly in order to be considered a crime, the bill strengthens protections for library collections and resources, further safeguarding intellectual freedom and access to information for all Marylanders.

The Freedom to Read Act is a vital safeguard against censorship, discrimination, and infringement upon the rights of individuals to access information freely in all library

settings. The Maryland Association of School Librarians urges the House to support this important piece of legislation, as it aligns with the core values of freedom of expression and access to information for all.

Finally, the Maryland Association of School Librarians would like to share an anecdote from one of our members that reminds us why access to books and the freedom to read is so very important, "Books provide a spark of light in dim places. I have heard numerous stories over the years, but perhaps the most touching was shared with me just a few weeks ago. Upon entering the library for the "Battle of the Books" (BOTB) weekly club, a student was so excited to share about the "reading light" she received over the holiday break. She explained that the light allowed her to read the weekly assigned pages for BOTB until she was tired enough to go to sleep. More excitedly, she would not need to get up to turn off the light. She also mentioned the joy of reading about what was happening in the great books she received as a participant in BOTB. This student has attended every book club meeting this year, which convenes on Tuesday mornings at 8:15 am in the library."

A story like this speaks to the same volume just as the spark of light illuminates. Students find comfort in sharing information, having rich discussions, and communicating interest in a safe space.

The library has been and continues to be that spark of light in a place that is needed for students to make world connections that are often housed in the books and information found in the library. Supporting HB 785 is imperative for all of our students.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Sturge, Advocacy Chair

Maryland Association of School Librarians