

February 19, 2024

Delegate Vanessa Atterbeary, Chair
Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

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

I am writing in support of **HB 0785 Freedom to Read Act**. This legislation is necessary to counteract a national movement that has now reached Maryland to censor library materials and to intimidate library workers who uphold organizational policy.

In the summer of 2023, I collaborated with a colleague to distribute a statewide survey to learn more about the challenges libraries in Maryland are facing and to learn about what support library workers needed. Survey respondents were asked to limit responses to their experiences over the past year.

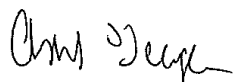
Just over 43% of respondents said they had experienced school library book challenges; over 21% experienced challenges to public library displays and programs; and 15% experienced public library book challenges.

A Calvert County respondent noted there have been "...complaints to the county commissioners about where certain books are shelved." In St. Mary's County, "...A resident has also written letters to the editor of the local media outlet, mailed letters to people in the community, and gone to a public county budget hearing to ask that the library be defunded as long as it has any books that Florida Governor DeSantis has on his 'bad' list."

I support the efforts of Speaker Jones, Delegate Jones and all of the bill sponsors to ensure Maryland's libraries remain welcoming places for all and a space where civil dialogue can happen during a discussion about a good book. As Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, professor emerita at Ohio State University and children's literature scholar, said: "When there are enough books available that can act as both mirrors and windows for all our children, they will see we can celebrate both our differences and our similarities."

Thank you for your support and consideration.

Sincerely,



Ashley Teagle

CEO