

## Support: HB 785 Freedom to Read Act

2/18/2024

Maryland House  
Ways and Means Committee  
Room 131  
House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair, Vice-Chair, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the pediatric nurse practitioners (PNPs) and fellow pediatric-focused advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) of the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP) Chesapeake Chapter, I am writing to express our **Support for HB 785 Freedom to Read Act**.

We support establishing state-wide standards for public libraries, guided by content experts in librarian science and pedagogy. As experts in pediatrics and advocates for the health of children, we support the protection of minors from exposure to sexually explicit materials, however, we are seeing this being used as a dog whistle to enforce censoring materials representing marginalized groups.

Specifically, there is no research showing that reading books that discuss sex acts correlates with an increased risk of harm, earlier sexual practice, or risk of being a victim of sexual assault. The opposite can be true - these items can broaden perspectives, make youth more aware of risk, and become a source of strength to encourage children that they are not alone.

It is our position that this bill will directly help the students and faculty within Carroll County Public Schools, which has made national news with a book ban of nearly 60 books. This includes classics such as *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Kite Runner*, *Water For Elephants*, and *The Bluest Eye* while refusing to remove the Bible. Despite a selected book review committee composed of honors students and educators who, following a full examination of certain books, recommended that many removed books should be allowed, the superintendent overrode this decision and further enforced the ban. Although it was not upheld, the book *All Are Welcome* was temporarily removed from some Pre-K/K classes in CCPS because of parental complaints of portraying same-sex parents, claiming this was also inappropriate. Within CCPS, a policy was also created that would allow for retaliation against librarians and educators for purchasing books that others find inappropriate. Allowing those of a certain religion or political viewpoint to determine which books are "sexually explicit" despite a full literature review as well as recommendations from librarians and other educators is a gross attack on the public school system, students, and educators.

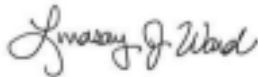
It is important to note that this book ban follows a ban on pride flags passed in June 2022 and the resultant selection of a biased health curriculum review committee which removed many LGBTQIA+ topics from the required health education curriculum. These signs of escalation will not be stopped unless state law supersedes. Sitting CCPS school board members have publicly stated that "children do not need to be exposed to these alternative lifestyles" when referring to same-sex families and

repeatedly speak at large meetings against “dangerous gender ideologies” when referring to trans students. An October 2023 article found that 12% of the books banned in CCPS are written by non-binary authors and 45% include LGBTQIA+ characters, a statistically impossible find if at random.

As you are likely aware, suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for children aged 10 to 17, and LGBTQIA+ children are at the highest risk, yet studies have shown that simple means of inclusion can decrease suicide rates. Continuing to allow the disproportionate attacks on the public-school system’s minority groups, limiting the safe expression of curious teenagers via literature, and persecuting educators will only cause harm to the children in Maryland. We trust the qualified educators to use their professional judgment in determining the appropriateness of literature. We also encourage parents who do not feel certain topics are appropriate to be involved with their child’s education and address those concerns directly within their family, while not interfering with others’ parental rights.

For these reasons the Maryland Chesapeake Chapter of NAPNAP extends their **Support for HB 785 Freedom to Read Act**. The pediatric advanced practice nurses of your state are grateful to you for your attention to these crucial issues. The members of Chesapeake Chapter of the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners memberships includes over 200 primary and acute care pediatric nurse practitioners who are committed to improving the health of and advocating for Maryland’s pediatric patients. If we can be of any further assistance, or if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Lindsay J. Ward, the Chesapeake Chapter President at 410-507-3642, or [MDChesNAPNAPLeg@outlook.com](mailto:MDChesNAPNAPLeg@outlook.com).

Sincerely,



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