

Testimony in Favor of
HB785
Freedom to Read Act
Hearing Before
Ways and Means Committee
February 21, 2024

Madam Chair and Honored Members of the Committee,

Citizens for Maryland Libraries (CML), wish to voice its strong support for this bill. CML is a non-profit association that works to build greater public awareness of the need for the services that Maryland libraries across the state provide its citizens. Recognizing the importance of our public libraries to the over three million card carrying Maryland library users, CML is a strong statewide network of individuals and organizations who value and advocate for Maryland libraries.

To read and read well is the single best predictor that a child will be successful in school and successful in life. Children and young adult librarians, in our public libraries, receive advanced formal education and training in order to dedicate their lives in helping our children find the resources they need to become lifelong readers. They are careful to provide reading materials and literary works that are well reviewed and that contribute to a well-rounded collection appropriate for each age. On any given day, a child or teenager can go to their library and find something to read that speaks to their culture, experience, and life challenges, helping them to understand that they are not alone.

Passing HB785 would protect 1st Amendment rights of both children and parents. Most importantly, it protects the right of each individual parent to decide what is permissible for their child to read and takes that decision away from the arbitrary whim of certain interest groups. We ask passage of this bill.