
TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF HB 282

Public Schools - Sexually Explicit Materials - Prohibited in Libraries and Media Centers

Ways and Means

January 23, 2025

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly opposes HB 282, which would restrict access to educational materials deemed “sexually explicit.” This legislation undermines fundamental rights – particularly freedom of speech and expression – hinders the educational development of students, and may disregard students’ identities and negatively impact their social and mental well-being.

HB 282 poses a significant threat to freedom of expression by restricting access to educational materials. The subjective nature of defining what constitutes “sexually explicit” content risks the removal of critical resources that address topics such as human development and personal autonomy. This form of censorship would narrow the perspectives available to students, limiting their ability to explore diverse ideas and make informed decisions.¹

HB 282 would contradict the intent of the Freedom to Read Act, enacted during the 2024 legislative session. This act established clear standards requiring local school systems to provide materials and resources that reflect diverse interests and informational needs. It also explicitly prohibits rejecting materials based on a difference in an author’s perspectives or disagreements rooted in political or religious ideologies.²

HB 282 would deprive students of opportunities to develop essential life skills. Resources that address topics like relationships, consent, and sexual health are vital for helping young people make informed decisions, build healthy relationships, and understand their bodies. These materials are a necessity in empowering students with knowledge and respect, guiding them toward positive personal development, and preparing them to apply real-world scenarios beyond the classroom.³ Without access to comprehensive education on these topics, students may severely struggle to navigate aspects of their lives, resulting in negative long-term consequences for their relationships and health.⁴ And in the absence of these materials, students will be left

¹ George, S. *Silenced voices: Ripples of book ban*. (2023, October 12). Information Matters, Vol. 3, Issue 10. <https://informationmatters.org/2023/10/silenced-voices-ripples-of-book-ban/>

² Maryland General Assembly. (2024). *Fiscal and policy note: House Bill 785*. https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2024RS/fnotes/bil_0005/hb0785.pdf

³ Rocca, C. (2022, February 18). *What students are saying about book bans*. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/18/learning/students-book-bans.html>

⁴ American Academy of Pediatrics. (2024, February 15). *The importance of access to comprehensive sex education*. American Academy of Pediatrics. <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/adolescent-sexual-health/equitable->

vulnerable to misinformation, increasing the chances of perpetuating negative stereotypes and biases towards topics and people.⁵

HB 282 would disproportionately impact marginalized groups, particularly LGBTQIA+ youth, by limiting their access to resources that affirm their identities and experiences. This exclusion would hinder their ability to recognize and embrace who they are, further marginalizing the vulnerable group and exacerbating mental health challenges.⁶ Studies have shown that LGBTQIA+ youth who have access to supportive, inclusive resources are more likely to experience better mental health outcomes and improved self-esteem.⁷ Denying LGBTQIA+ youth these resources is not only isolating, but also sends a harmful message that their identities are not valid or worthy of recognition.

HB 282 not only undermines educational equity, but it also fails to prepare students for a diverse and inclusive world. Students must be prepared with the ability to innovate and think critically, and censoring diverse viewpoints limits students' perspectives on new ideas, which can hinder their understanding and growth. This bill will disproportionately impact low-income students who rely heavily on public education for learning opportunities. During the 2023-2024 academic year, 55.99% of students enrolled in Maryland public schools received free or reduced-price meals,⁸ highlighting the significant portion of students who would be impacted by this bill. Moreover, by limiting access to these critical materials, HB 282 exacerbates existing social and economic disparities in vulnerable students, restricting their success.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges an unfavorable report on HB 282.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

[access-to-sexual-and-reproductive-health-care-for-all-youth/the-importance-of-access-to-comprehensive-sex-education/#:~:text=Comprehensive%20sex%20education%20is%20a,their%20sexuality%20and%20sexual%20health.](#)

⁵ NAACP. (2023, March 15). *Book bans act as policy violence, promoting anti-Blackness*. NAACP.

<https://naacp.org/articles/book-bans-act-policy-violence-promoting-anti-blackness>

⁶Borba, M. (2024, May). *Why book bans are bad for mental health*. Psychology Today.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/well-read/202405/why-book-bans-are-bad-for-mental-health>

⁷Russell, S. T., & Fish, J. N. (2016). Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth. *Annual review of clinical psychology*, 12, 465–487. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-021815-093153>

⁸ Maryland State Department of Education. (n.d.). *Free and reduced-price meal statistics*. Maryland Public Schools. <https://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/SchoolandCommunityNutrition/Pages/FreeReducedPriceMealStatistics.aspx>