

I am submitting testimony against HB0282.

First of all, this bill is not needed. There are already provisions, and more importantly, policies in place to keep inappropriate sexually explicit materials out of our school libraries and media centers. Moreover, I trust the experience and judgement of our very well trained school librarians and teachers to determine what is age-appropriate.

As a child in the 1960's, I welcomed information in the libraries about some communities that I knew nothing about. It gave me insight into worlds I was not familiar with, and helped me understand challenges that I myself did not face. This fuller understanding was key in helping me develop empathy for people who go through different experiences.

It also helped me understand what I myself was going through. An example would be, "Are You There God...It's Me, Margaret", by Judy Blume. Reading this book also made me realize that other girls were going through the same thing. It helped me feel "OK". It was one of many powerful and memorable books I read in my youth.

I fear that this proposed law could very well exclude information that could help other students feel like they are not alone. Without these books, they would feel unseen, and feel like they do not belong, because they see no stories about themselves.

Additionally, the lack of information about other communities could also keep other students from understanding about communities that they are not a part of. As an adult, I realized that there was a complete dearth of information about the LGBTQIA+ community. This lack of information, I believe, resulted in a total lack of understanding about LGBTQ+ persons, their struggles. It resulted in me believing they were different. When in fact, we are all humans with joys and challenges - just like everyone else.

Honestly, I wish those books had been available to me, and I am glad that students today have access to books like these. Perhaps this is a little Pollyanna-ish, but I believe that the more we understand others, the more we 'get' that we are all going through life, and doing our best. It brings us TOGETHER and makes us feel like we ALL belong.

Please do not vote for HB0282.

Respectfully,

Renee Cantori
Anne Arundel County