



2601 N HOWARD ST
BALTIMORE, MD 21218
TEL 410) 625-LGBT (5428)
FAX 410) 625-7423
www.freestate-justice.org

Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Tuesday, January 21, 2025

HB0282 – Public Schools - Sexually Explicit Materials - Prohibited in
Libraries and Media Centers

Position: **UNFAVORABLE**

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Esteemed Members of the Ways
and Means Committee:

My name is Ronnie L. Taylor, and I serve as the Community Advocacy
Manager at FreeState Justice, a nonprofit organization dedicated to advocating
for LGBTQ+ rights in Maryland. I write in strong opposition to **HB0282**, a bill
that, while framed as an effort to regulate "sexually explicit" materials in
public school libraries and media centers, instead poses a serious threat to
academic freedom, inclusivity, and the rights of LGBTQ+ students in
Maryland.

HB0282 is a thinly veiled book banning effort that would disproportionately
impact LGBTQ+ content, reproductive health education, and historical
narratives that do not conform to a narrow moral viewpoint. Censorship bills
like **HB0282** have been used across the country to erase LGBTQ+ experiences
from educational spaces, leaving LGBTQ+ youth isolated and without
resources that affirm their identities.

Numerous studies highlight the dangers of limiting access to diverse materials
in schools:

- According to the American Library Association (ALA), 49% of banned
books in 2023 contained LGBTQ+ themes. These bans
disproportionately impact LGBTQ+ students, making them feel
invisible in educational settings.
- The Trevor Project's 2023 National Survey found that 45% of
LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered suicide in the past year, with
access to affirming educational materials significantly reducing these
rates.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Phillip Westry, Esq.
Executive Director

Lauren Pruitt, Esq.
Legal Director

BOARD

Lindsey Young
President

Brianna January

Andrew Adelman, Esq.

Lee Carpenter, Esq.

Brenda Dorsch

Amanda Peskin

Bonnie Smith

Adam Farra

Diana Philip

Tina Jones

Miller Douglas

Lauren Fleming

Andrew Ansel

- Censorship efforts disproportionately impact students of color, as books addressing race, systemic inequities, and intersectional experiences are also targeted for removal.

Concerns with **HB0282**:

1. **Vague Language Leads to LGBTQ+ Censorship**

- The bill defines “sexually explicit materials” as those that contain “graphic or obscene depictions of sexual activity” but does not specify how “graphic” or “obscene” are determined. Historically, similar language has been weaponized to remove books featuring LGBTQ+ identities, even when those books contain no explicit content.
- For example, *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe and *All Boys Aren’t Blue* by George M. Johnson have been removed from school libraries under similar laws in other states, even though they primarily discuss personal identity and self-discovery.

2. **Targeting LGBTQ+ Educational Resources and Health Education**

- Maryland schools are required to provide comprehensive health education, which includes age-appropriate discussions on human sexuality, reproductive health, and LGBTQ+ identities.
- Bills like **HB0282** have been used in other states to remove factual books on LGBTQ+ relationships, safe sex practices, and gender identity, depriving students of life-saving, medically accurate information.

3. **Violates the First Amendment and Creates Unnecessary Bureaucracy**

- The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and federal courts have consistently ruled against vague censorship laws in schools, citing First Amendment concerns.
- Local school districts already have policies in place for selecting appropriate materials, making this legislation unnecessary and costly to implement.

4. **Harmful Impact on Students**

- Removing LGBTQ+ materials sends a clear message to queer students: your identity is not acceptable, and your experiences do not belong in the classroom. This fosters a hostile environment, leading to increased mental health challenges.
- School libraries serve all students, not just those whose parents seek to impose restrictive moral viewpoints. If a parent objects to a book, they already have the right to restrict their own child's access—but they should not dictate what is available to an entire student body.

HB0282 is not about protecting students—it is about silencing marginalized voices and advancing a political agenda that seeks to erase LGBTQ+ identities from public schools. Instead

of passing laws that stigmatize and isolate vulnerable youth, we should be investing in inclusive education that fosters belonging, academic curiosity, and critical thinking.

I urge this committee to reject **HB0282** and uphold Maryland's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in education.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,

Ronnie L. Taylor

Ronnie L. Taylor

Sources:

1. <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/by-the-numbers>
2. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2023/>
3. <https://pen.org/report/banned-in-the-usa/>
4. [Maryland Comprehensive Health Education Framework](#)
5. <https://www.aclu.org/issues/free-speech/book-bans>