

Testimony Opposing HB0710
Criminal Law - Display of Obscene Material to Minors

UNFAVORABLE

March 3, 2026

The Honorable Chair Delegate J. Sandy Bartlett, Vice Chair Delegate Debra Davis, and esteemed members of the House Judiciary Committee:

I am writing to ask you to vote against House Bill 710 because it is just another effort to legislate discrimination in the form of book bans – this time in the form of threatening educators with criminal penalties if they allow students to access illustrated LGBTQIA+ stories in public schools.

Maryland law already protects kids from a long list of harmful content in books, pamphlets, and magazines, and it imposes criminal penalties for violations. MD Code, Criminal Law, § 11-203(a)-(b), (d) (displaying to a minor an item whose content or cover includes an “obscene” image or a “depiction of illicit sex” may constitute misdemeanor violation).

HB0710 would add “drawings” and “illustrations” to the list of such “items,” and extend liability to public school principals for “willfully or knowingly display[ing,] exhibit[ing,] [or distributing such an item] to a minor.”

Thus, the bill signals that LGBTQIA+ representation has no place in public schools and that LGBTQIA+ graphic novels and stories do not belong in school libraries. It is part of a current wave of anti-transgender legislation, including bills aimed at restricting access to books that discuss or depict sex and sexual experiences. In the process, it seeks to disparage and erase LGBTQIA+ individuals and identities.

Students need to be able to see themselves in what they are reading and studying as reflection of themselves and their histories. For kids who may identify with underrepresented groups, such as the LGBTQIA+ community, they should not have to wait until they reach college to see people like themselves. For other kids, reading a graphic novel could enlighten and inform them about people who are different from them, expanding their world and promoting empathy and understanding. This bill would ultimately harm children by preventing them from learning about the full diversity of our society, including underrepresented groups.

Furthermore, this bill would apply to health and sex education materials as well, which relies upon illustrations to inform about important topics. We should not threaten school principals with fines and jail time if a graphic novel in the school library has a picture involving an LGBTQIA+ relationship. Instead, we should promote an atmosphere in public school that is welcoming, educational, and inclusive for all students.

Respectfully Submitted,

Melinda Littell
Arnold, D33C