



PSSAM
Public School Superintendents' Association
OF MARYLAND

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BILL: SB 738
TITLE: Freedom to Read Act
DATE: February 23, 2024
POSITION: Support with Amendments
COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four public school superintendents, **supports SB 738 with amendments.**

This bill establishes State standards for the operation of libraries that receives funding from the State; altering the duties of the State Library Board, the State Library Agency, and regional resource centers to incorporate the State standards for libraries; making funding for certain libraries contingent on adoption of a written policy consistent with the State standards for libraries; authorizing the State Comptroller to withhold funding from libraries under certain circumstances; etc.

PSSAM understands the impetus to change the law regarding public libraries, but strongly opposes the inclusion of public school libraries in the bill. School libraries serve a different purpose than public libraries - to primarily complement and enhance public school *instruction*. This bill would propose an unprecedented shift by putting school libraries under the authority of the State Library System and away from public school systems. Treating the administration of public libraries and school libraries the same will inevitably lead to mismatched policy standards that do not accurately and appropriately suit either system.

Under State law and COMAR 13A.05.04.01, it is clearly stated that school libraries are to be operated by and for local school systems, governing the role of school librarians and media specialists, and the instructional alignment of school library materials. Therefore, we ask to strike p. 2, lines 2-8 of the bill that inappropriately apply employment considerations for school librarians and media specialists based on the State Library standards, instead of these longstanding COMAR provisions.

New standards may be needed for public libraries, but the existing state regulations governing school libraries appropriately define a much more specific educational and instructionally-aligned role for school libraries in accordance with local school system policies.

The Maryland General Assembly, in creating the Maryland State Board of Education and local boards of education, has delegated to them the responsibility of delivering a high-quality statewide system of public education. PSSAM has a longstanding policy of opposing legislative efforts that impinge on local governance. Local superintendents strongly believe that the role of employee management, including instructional staff, librarians and media specialists, belongs solely to local boards of education. *Rest assured, PSSAM's opposition to this bill does not rest on the merits of new standards for public libraries, but rather opposition to statutorily mandating revisions to the management and governance of local school systems.*

For these reasons, PSSAM requests a **favorable with amendments** report on Senate Bill 738 to remove any changes to the current governance structure of school libraries and library staff.