

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL SB0738 - FAVORABLE

Freedom to Read Act

TO: Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Wendy Novak, Carroll County, Maryland

February 22, 2024

I'm a mom, a Sunday School teacher, and a passionate reader because books are magical. They allow you to have a window to another world, or a mirror into your own. Reading is the key to lifelong learning and helps grow vocabulary. Research shows that high quality library programs are correlated to student achievement and can help close racial achievement gaps. It is good for our students to read; we need to be doing what we can to support them by providing access to a variety of books. Sadly, some parents want to restrict access for all students, not just their own. There has been a huge increase in attempts to restrict what books are available for our children to read. In Carroll County more than fifty-six titles from the school libraries were removed from shelves in response to challenges organized by the local Moms for Liberty chapter. The challenged books included a disproportionate amount of female and non-binary authors, and a disproportionate amount of LGBTQ characters and characters of color. Books that are frequently used for APA curriculum and exams were included on that list, such as "Slaughterhouse-Five," "The Bluest Eye," and "The Handmaid's Tale." Parents are determining what is available in our library; parents that believe our LGBTQ students are not appropriate for their kids to know they exist. Parents that believe discussions about trauma should only be shared with a counselor, anyone that talks about their trauma is open to ridicule, believe books written by survivors of trauma are pornography. These parents are not qualified to determine what should be available for our schools. Carroll created a "Sexually Explicit materials" policy that is so vague, it is likely it will be biased against our LGBTQ community and/or students of color. It is not fair that a student in one county might not have access to materials that interest or represent them because their county will not allow it. Parents can discuss with their own child to determine what books they feel appropriate. Our librarians are trained to curate a selection of materials that will best serve their population. State standards will allow librarians to create the high-quality libraries our students need.

I request a favorable report on Senate Bill 738.