

**TESTIMONY OF RONALD WEICH
DEAN OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE SCHOOL OF LAW**

IN SUPPORT OF THE FREEDOM TO READ ACT (SB 738)

MARYLAND SENATE

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

February 21, 2024

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the Committee: I serve as dean of the University of Baltimore School of Law. Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Senate Bill 738, the Freedom to Read Act.

As a law school dean, I have a professional and personal interest in the preservation of constitutional protections, including the foundational elements of the First Amendment. Because my duties include oversight of the University of Baltimore Law Library, I have a strong institutional interest in the effective operation of libraries for the benefit of my students and other library patrons.

The Freedom to Read Act (SB 738) establishes standards for state-funded libraries. The bill states that libraries should not exclude materials because of the origin, background or views of a person who created the material, nor should a library prohibit or remove material from its catalog because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval. In these ways, the bill protects libraries as they defend against unconstitutional censorship.

The bill does not dictate the topics or titles that must be in a library, nor does it force anyone from borrowing items they find objectionable. It simply codifies the principle of open and inclusive access to library materials, consistent with the First Amendment, and protects library staff from being penalized for their important work.

Unfortunately, we have seen a national movement to constrain and censor library materials, as well as efforts to penalize the crucial work carried out by library staff. Some of these challenges have reached Maryland and should be halted before they take root.

For these reasons, I am proud to support the Freedom to Read Act, which reasserts the constitutional principle that library materials, services and resources are essential for the interest, information and enlightenment of all individuals served by libraries.