

SB738

FAV

My name is Jacob Gerding, and I am on the executive board of the Maryland Association of School Librarians. I am also an elementary school librarian in Charles County. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB785/SB738 also known as the Freedom to Read bill. This bill is an important step in the ongoing fight against censorship nationally in both public and school libraries. The Freedom to Read Act provides protection for school librarians to perform their essential work without fear of harassment or retribution, and ultimately, allows our libraries to be the hub of a vibrant inclusive learning environment.

In the last two years, we have watched as a politically motivated movement has repeatedly attempted, sometimes successfully, to remove books from the shelves of school libraries. School librarians never thought this would happen, until it did. Efforts at censoring and restricting access to a high-quality school library collection prevent school librarians from fulfilling a key duty – curating a robust, up-to-date collection that meets the needs of our students and the community. We take our collection development responsibilities seriously.

A recent survey of Maryland librarians conducted by the Maryland Association of School Librarians on book challenges and censorship in their districts, revealed that book challenges have become a statewide epidemic. And although we take our commitment of selecting and evaluating titles for our school library collections seriously, many librarians are fearful of job security and retribution for having diverse collections, and soft censorship is taking place. Soft censorship is just as detrimental to the intellectual freedom of the school community as is book banning and unconstitutional censorship. Those that ban and censor information have never been on the right side of history.

The Maryland Association of School Librarians feels strongly that this legislation would: defend libraries and library staff from punitive actions for doing their jobs and adhering to the policies and procedures of their library and will uphold and ensure school boards also adhere to the professional policies of selection, evaluation, and review of library materials.

It is said that books in a school library collection should reflect the student community, like a mirror; at the same time, it should be a window through which students may learn about the wide and diverse world. Parents are the first teachers of their children and may decide what they want their children to experience in their reading lives; but no one person or group should be able to make such a personal decision for other people's children as it makes us all a little less free. The Freedom to Read Act defends the first amendment right of every student and Marylander to access a library collection that is culturally responsive and inclusive of all individuals served by the library, as well as the world in which we live.

On behalf of school librarians, students, and families across Maryland, thank you for standing up for our first amendment rights.

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Maryland Association of School Librarians Delegate to the American Association of School Librarians



