

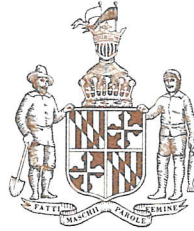
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401
Senate Bill 738 – Freedom to Read Act

February 23, 2024

Mister Chairman and Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

According to the Maryland State Library Agency, Maryland's public libraries have seen a 133% increase in formal challenges to their collections, and a 263% increase in informal challenges since 2019. And, in a September 2023 survey by the Maryland Association of School Librarians (MASL), 70% of respondents reported book challenges at their school districts.

Along with these challenges, librarians in our state and across the county have seen a rise in what the American Library Association refers to as Hateful Conduct. They define hateful conduct as conduct that promotes intimidation and hate against people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or serious disease. While hateful conduct often does not meet the criteria of criminal harassment or stalking statutes, it is still behavior that librarians, patrons and library collections are being subjected to.

Senate Bill 738 - The Freedom to Read Act - is being introduced to protect Maryland's library collections, the librarians who curate them and the patrons who access them. This crucial and timely legislation will safeguard our libraries and librarians from becoming the next frontier of censorship aimed at limiting the world views accessible to our communities.

The Freedom to Read Act will establish a set of State Standards for Libraries that enshrine into law the following:

- Library materials exist and should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all persons the library serves in Maryland.
- A library should not exclude material from its catalog because of the origin, background, or views of a person who created the material.
- A library should not proscribe or remove material from its catalog because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

The bill then:

- directs any library, school library, resource center, or any other library to adopt and follow a written policy consistent with these State Standards;
- protects our school and public library workers by preventing punitive actions being taken against them for their adherence to the State Standards for Libraries;
- safeguards Maryland's public library collections from intentional attempts to remove or damage materials by increasing fines for offenders.

Libraries and librarians play an integral role in our communities and are a treasure that deserves all the support and protection that we can offer and so I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 738.