



**Testimony in support of SB738: Freedom to Read Act**  
**Hearing before the Energy, Education and Environment Committee**  
**February 23, 2024**  
**Submitted by Tonya Aikens, Howard County Library System President & CEO**

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express **support for SB738: Freedom to Read Act**. This legislation is designed to ensure the continued excellence of Maryland's libraries and to preserve our ability to be responsive to the unique communities we serve by protecting collections and staff from pressures by government officials and special interest groups.

The Freedom to Read Act establishes basic guidelines for library collection policy while enabling local jurisdictions to independently develop a collection that meets the needs of their community without governmental overreach. This bill ensures students will have access to the resources they need to succeed educationally, to develop strong critical thinking skills, and to become healthy, engaged, and productive citizens.

This bill recognizes the professionalism and trust that not only our staff and Board of Trustees have earned from our community, but also staff and Trustees across the state. It provides safeguards for library staff, protecting them against being penalized for simply doing their job. Additionally, this act strengthens protections against willful theft or damage of the library materials that are purchased at public expense and safeguards local governments from expensive and unnecessary litigation. And, as the title indicates, the bill also safeguards each person's freedom to access and read the material that interests them.

We know that successful, thriving libraries are a requirement for successful, thriving communities. The crucial role that libraries have in guaranteeing each person's access to information cannot be overstated. We applaud the General Assembly's work in codifying the important role of libraries in Maryland by defining standards, supporting library professionals, and protecting the collections of Maryland's libraries from theft and destruction. We support passage of this legislation, knowing it will continue Maryland's legacy of outstanding libraries.

Thank you once again for your ongoing support of Maryland's libraries.

Sincerely,

Tonya Aikens,  
President & CEO