

BILL: House Bill 25 - Public Schools - Sexually Explicit Materials - Prohibited in Libraries and Media Centers

DATE: January 31, 2024

POSITION: UNFAVORABLE

COMMITTEE: Ways and Means

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As the leading organization centered on creating and sustaining inclusive K-12 education for LGBTQ+ students in the state of Maryland, GLSEN Maryland **opposes** House Bill 25.

The definition of "sexually explicit materials" in this legislation is vague, opening the door for any book that even merely mentions the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals to be deemed inappropriate. What may be deemed inappropriate by one person, could be a life-affirming reflection of identity for another.

Consider the trans student seeking a story that mirrors their own journey of self-discovery. Or the young lesbian yearning for a book where she can finally see herself portrayed not as a label, but as a human being. These youth, and all youth, will be denied the books they need to navigate their identities, understand an everchanging world, and feel a sense of belonging in their own schools. We must not lose sight of the overwhelming evidence demonstrating the vital role of inclusive books in fostering positive school environments for all students, not just LGBTQ+ youth. As research by our parent organization, GLSEN National, shows, students in schools with inclusive literature and curriculum reported hearing fewer slurs, lower levels of victimization, felt a high sense of belonging, and had a higher academic achievement.¹

Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, a renowned children's literature scholar, poignantly articulated the power of books. They are not merely pages of text; they are windows offering glimpses into both familiar and unfamiliar realities. They are sliding glass doors, inviting us to step into diverse narratives and walk alongside characters whose experiences may differ vastly from our own.² For LGBTQ+ youth, these books are not just stories; they are mirrors reflecting identities long relegated to the shadows. This legislation, unfortunately, seeks to slam shut those windows and lock those doors.

Additionally, this legislation undermines the very purpose of schools as places of open inquiry and exploration. By restricting access to certain literature based on undefined criteria, sends the messages that some ideas are too dangerous and inappropriate to explore. This, unfortunately, stifles critical thinking and the intellectual curiosity of youth.

Accordingly, GLSEN Maryland respectfully requests an **unfavorable** committee on House Bill 25.

¹ Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., & Menard, L. (2022). The 2021 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN.

² Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6(3), ix-xi.