



BILL: House Bill 25 **DATE:** January 31, 2024

SUBJECT: Public Schools - Sexually Explicit Materials - Prohibited in Libraries and Media Centers **COMMITTEE:** Ways and Means

TESTIMONY FROM: Liz Sundermann-Zinger, Chief of the Central Library and State Library Resource Center, Enoch Pratt Free Library **POSITION:** Oppose

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins and members of the Committee,

The Enoch Pratt Free Library and State Library Resource Center (EPFL/SLRC) opposes House Bill 25 - Public Schools - Sexually Explicit Materials - Prohibited in Libraries and Media Centers.

EPFL/SLRC has serious concerns about this effort to censor library materials and inhibit young Marylanders' freedom to read. This bill is an unnecessary attempt to censor school library materials where no problem exists.

In addition, language in the bill is ambiguous and could be left open to interpretation. There is no legal standard for "sexually explicit materials," and what is offensive to one person may encompass vital information to another. Such subjective terminology may intentionally or unintentionally exclude reading materials that are written by or for specific segments of the population. A well-rounded public education is meant to break down walls and foster curiosity and good will between all segments of our society. Removing books from school libraries that have been chosen for specific reasons by professional librarians to help achieve that goal is counter-productive to a civil society.

In addition to children learning about people who may be different than them by reading books, other children seek validation or recognition of their own experiences. By removing books for potentially dogmatic or discriminatory reasons, for examples books that include families with LGBTQ+ members or books that include inter-racial relationships, this bill may remove that touchstone for groups of children who already struggle to find validation of their life experience. Of the top thirteen (13) most-challenged books in 2022, as listed on the American Library

Association’s website, ten (10) featured LGBTQ+ content, content about people of color, or both. Furthermore, by potentially removing books about victims of abuse, children experiencing abuse may feel more isolated. Four (4) of the most challenged books in 2022 contain content about victims of abuse.

School Librarians and teachers are professionally trained to select books that are right for the students in their communities. Individual parents and caregivers must be given the freedom to help their own children make reading choices that make sense for them and their families. They must not be given the ability to strip away that freedom from other people’s children.

EPFL/SLRC supports a more balanced approach that respects the autonomy of educators and ensures that students have access to a wide range of materials that contribute to their intellectual and emotional development.

EPFL/SLRC does not support the passage of this bill.