

Policy Foundation of Maryland

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment, Ways and Means

Testimony on: SB0738 - Freedom to Read Act

Sponsor(s): Senator King, Beidle, Benson, Brooks, Elfreth, Feldman, Ferguson, Gile, Guzzone, Hettleman, Jackson, Kagan, Kelly, Kramer, Lewis Young, McCray, Waldstreicher, A. Washington, M. Washington, and Zucker

Organization: Policy Foundation of Maryland, Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Sarahia Benn (CEO/President) PFOM

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: March 27, 2023 1PM

Chair and Members of the Committee,

Policy Foundation of Maryland is a statewide grassroots organization focused on State and County level legislation and policies that impacts Black, Brown, Marginalized, low income communities and Veterans affairs. Education related legislation is of massive importance to these communities particularly due to how impacted these communities have been historically and currently particularly in for multiply residents in rural areas.

My name is Sarahia Benn, CEO/President of the Policy Foundation of Maryland (PFOM) and representative of the Maryland Legislative Coalition, a non-profit organization and a coalition with over 30,000 members across the state. PFOM is composed of both current and former educators, and we hold a firm belief in the power of education rooted in a comprehensive understanding of history, the arts, and diverse viewpoints.

Importance of Unrestricted Access to Information

We strongly support Senate Bill 0738, the Freedom to Read Act. This legislation is crucial in ensuring Maryland students have access to a wide range of library materials that reflect the richness and complexity of our world. Exposure to diverse perspectives and challenging ideas is fundamental to critical thinking, intellectual growth, and responsible citizenship.

Statewide Standards and Protection for Educators

The bill establishes a framework for consistent standards across school library media programs statewide. This ensures a baseline level of access to a variety of informational resources for all



students. Additionally, the legislation protects educators from retaliation for performing their duties in accordance with these established standards. This safeguards academic freedom and empowers educators to curate collections that spark curiosity and encourage exploration.

Alignment with Core Values

PFOM wholeheartedly supports the core values enshrined in the Freedom to Read Act:

- ❖ **Universality of Access:** Library materials, services, and resources should be available to all individuals seeking information and enlightenment.
- ❖ **Inclusivity of Materials:** Selection of materials should not be based on the origin, background, or viewpoints of the creator.
- ❖ **Protection from Censorship:** Libraries should not remove materials due to partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

Lessons from History

It is indeed a concerning sign that such legislation is necessary in a nation with a long history of intellectual freedom. However, the rise of book bans and censorship attempts underscores the importance of establishing clear and enforceable standards.

The PFOM urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report on SB0738. This Act safeguards the intellectual freedom of our students and empowers educators to create rich learning environments that foster critical thinking and a well-informed citizenry.

For these reasons, I urge an **FAVORABLE REPORT** on **SB0738**.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarahia Benn
(Policy Foundation of Maryland, Maryland Legislative Coalition)

(Dedicated to Black History All Year Round)

“I don’t want to force myself into an institution that doesn’t seem to appreciate what I bring..”

[—-Hannah Jones](#)