



**Maryland Commission
on LGBTQIA+ Affairs**

**TESTIMONY OF JEREMY BROWNING
DIRECTOR, MARYLAND COMMISSION ON LGBTQIA+ AFFAIRS
UNFAVORABLE STATEMENT ON HB0025
PUBLIC SCHOOLS - SEXUALLY EXPLICIT MATERIALS - PROHIBITED IN
LIBRARIES AND MEDIA CENTERS**

January 31, 2024

Ways and Means Committee

The Hon. Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
The Hon. Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Vice Chair

Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Wilkins, and members of the Ways and Means Committee, my name is Jeremy Browning(he/him), and I am the Director of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs. The Commission was created by the 2021 Maryland General Assembly and later altered in 2023 to assess challenges facing our LGBTQIA+ communities, establish best practices and recommendations for LGBTQIA+ inclusion, and provide testimony to legislative and administrative bodies.

On behalf of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs, I am writing to express strong opposition to House Bill 25, which seeks to prohibit sexually explicit materials in public elementary, middle, and secondary school libraries and media centers. While we share the common goal of ensuring a safe and age-appropriate learning environment for all students, we believe that the existing laws and regulations, coupled with the robust review process that includes collection analysis, list generation and purchase recommendation, and administrative approvals before a material is purchased and added to a collection are sufficient. Articles from the Maryland Association of School Librarians on “How does a book end up in a School Library? A MASL Blog Series on Book Selection,” covers this process in detail at elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Furthermore, local school districts and school librarians, in collaboration with educators and parents, have established rigorous review processes to ensure that books and materials in school libraries align with educational standards and are age-appropriate.

This additional layer of legislation may create unnecessary burdens on school districts and limit the diversity of perspectives available to students. Moreover, the current comprehensive health education program, as required under the Maryland Comprehensive Health Education Framework already addresses family life and human sexuality in an age-appropriate manner.

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs acknowledges the importance of maintaining a supportive and inclusive educational environment for all students. However, we are deeply concerned that House Bill 25 may inadvertently lead to censorship and the removal of LGBTQIA+ books and materials from school libraries. The bill's broad language on "sexually explicit materials" could potentially be interpreted in a way that disproportionately impacts resources that address LGBTQIA+ issues, history, and identities.

We propose that, instead of introducing unnecessary legislation that will likely lead to censorship, that we focus on enhancing existing educational initiatives and curricula that promote understanding, tolerance, and inclusivity. The establishment of the Commission on History, Culture, and Civics with House Bill 50 would accomplish this by amplifying the voices and contributions of historically marginalized communities, fostering a more inclusive educational environment.

Along with my written testimony, I have submitted the *2024 Policy Priorities, Recommendations and Best Practices*, and *Recommendations for Supporting LGBTQIA+ Students* publications, which were unanimously approved by the Commission in 2023. These publications demonstrate the Commission's strong position on LGBTQIA+ inclusion in curricula and our educational systems.

In conclusion, we urge you to reconsider the necessity of House Bill 25 and its potential impact on limiting access to diverse and educational materials. We believe that collaboration between educators, parents, and the existing review processes is the key to maintaining a safe and enriching learning environment for all students.

On behalf of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs, I urge an unfavorable report on House Bill 25.