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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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Annapolis Pride's mission is to advocate for, empower, and celebrate the LGBTQ+ community in Anne Arundel County to live fully and authentically. Our vision is a safe, equitable, and anti-racist community where people of all identities thrive.

As such, the Board of Directors of Annapolis Pride **opposes** House Bill 25, which presents a deceptive argument under the guise of protecting children. This legislation is chock full of buzz words, such as "sexually explicit" and "graphic depictions". These terms are vague, leaving the door open for discriminatory application. Banning so-called sexually explicit materials without a clear and precise definition will stifle the educational environment by limiting access to diverse perspectives and experiences.

This legislation effectively demonizes any book that acknowledges the existence of LGBTQ+ people and their lived experiences. It is a deliberate misrepresentation, conflating inclusivity with explicitness, and attempting to relegate diverse narratives to the shadows.

Books, as Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, a former children's literature professor at Ohio State University, so poignantly stated, are more than mere text on pages. They are windows offering glimpses into realities both familiar and strange, expanding our understanding and empathy. They are sliding glass doors, inviting us to step into diverse narratives and walk alongside characters whose experiences may differ vastly from our own.¹ For many in the LGBTQ+ community, these books are not just stories—they are mirrors reflecting identities long relegated to the shadows.

Further, this legislation undermines the professional judgment of educators and librarians. Replacing the expertise of educators with politically motivated restrictions not only disregards their expertise, but also hinders their ability to foster critical thinking and intellectual curiosity in young minds. This bill won't protect children. But what it will do is undermine the very purpose of education.

Accordingly, Annapolis Pride respectfully requests an **unfavorable** committee report on House Bill 25.

¹ Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom, 6(3), ix-xi.