
The Virginia Library Association (VLA) and the Virginia Public Library Directors Association (VPLDA) recognize the intent behind House Bill 236 and share the goal of protecting the freedom to read and ensuring access to a broad range of ideas for all Virginians. Public libraries have long advanced these principles through professional collection development, established reconsideration processes, and governance models that respond to the needs of their local communities.

However, based on extensive feedback from public library directors across the Commonwealth, VLA and VPLDA must **oppose HB 236 as currently written** for the following reasons:

1. It Undermines Local Control and Professional Judgment

For generations, Virginia has relied on a framework that combines statewide standards with professionally guided library governance. HB 236 represents an unnecessary move toward centralized oversight that limits professional discretion and disrupts established practices. Existing library policies already address the bill's stated objectives.

2. The “Model Policy” Requirement Creates Risk and Uncertainty

The requirement that local policies be “consistent with” a state-developed model policy raises significant concerns. Because “consistent with” is undefined, compliance and enforcement remain unclear. Libraries are also concerned that future administrations could revise the model policy in ways that weaken protections for intellectual freedom.

3. The Mandated Reconsideration Process Is Overly Prescriptive

HB 236 imposes a detailed, uniform reconsideration and review process that fails to account for the wide variation among library systems. Directors note that this approach would be administratively burdensome, inflexible, and susceptible to political pressure, replacing effective local practices with a one-size-fits-all framework ill-suited to Virginia’s diverse library landscape.

4. The Bill Encourages Costly and Politically Motivated Litigation

Section § 42.1-45.4 permits any individual with a “vested interest,” or any author, to pursue legal action against a library board over collection decisions, even when there is no intent to censor. This provision invites litigation that could drain public resources and disrupt library services, without meaningfully improving access to materials.

5. It Risks Undermining Its Stated Purpose

Although presented as anti-censorship legislation, many library leaders believe HB 236 could instead be used to pressure or constrain libraries. In a polarized climate, the bill’s rigidity and enforcement mechanisms create opportunities for misuse and unintended consequences.

While introduced with constructive aims, HB 236 was drafted without sufficient input from the library professionals who manage collections, develop policies, and serve communities on a daily basis. For this reason, VLA and VPLDA recommend that the bill be **tabled** to pursue a more collaborative and balanced approach.

VLA and VPLDA strongly support the pursuit of a Freedom to Read bill for Virginia, but believe HB 236 requires substantial revision. We urge lawmakers to pause this legislation and consult directly with library professionals and local boards. Proven models from states such as Illinois, Rhode Island, and Maryland demonstrate that intellectual freedom can be protected without compromising local control or professional discretion.