



MEDIA ADVISORY

Circuit Court to Hear Arguments in Harford County School Board Challenge Over Young Adult Novel “*Flamer*”

<https://www.aclu-md.org/press-releases/circuit-court-to-hear-arguments-in-harford-county-school-board-challenge-over-young-adult-novel-flamer/>

Advisory for: 1:30pm Thursday, October 22, 2026

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Bel Air, MD – On Thursday, October 22, the Harford County Circuit Court will hear arguments from the local Harford County Board of Education asking the court to overturn a decision made by the Maryland State Board of Education. The MSBE decision reinstated the Young Adult novel *Flamer* to school libraries after the local board voted to remove the novel, overruling a carefully rendered decision by a review committee that found the book appropriate based on community standards and Maryland law.

Flamer is a vividly illustrated, semi-autobiographical graphic novel telling the story of Aiden, a Filipino American teenager spending the summer before his first year of high school at Boy Scout camp. The controversy over Harford Board efforts to bar the book from school libraries marks the first time any court will interpret Maryland’s “Freedom to Read Act,” a state law enacted by the Maryland General Assembly in 2024 to combat a proliferation of book bans across the country, including in Maryland.

WHAT: Court hearing on the Harford County State Board of Education’s challenge to The Maryland State Board of Education’s decision to reinstating the graphic novel, *Flamer*, back into county schools under the Maryland Freedom to Read Act

WHO: The ACLU of Maryland, The Maryland State Education Association, local parents, educators, community members, and students.

WHEN: Thursday, October 22 at 1:30pm

WHERE: Harford County Circuit Court, 20 W Courtland St. Bel Air, MD 21014

BACKGROUND:

Following a Harford parent's objection to the graphic novel *Flamer*, a local review committee convened under the Freedom to Read Act – consisting of parents, school personal and students – reviewed the book and voted unanimously to retain the novel in Harford County schools, a decision supported by the superintendent.

The parent appealed to the local Harford County Board of Education, which voted in a closed-door hearing without public notice 5-3 to remove *Flamer* from all county libraries calling it “pervasively vulgar”.

Community members appealed to the Maryland State Board of Education, which reversed the Harford County Board of Education's decision to ban *Flamer* as arbitrary because it failed to offer any reasoning for rejecting the findings of the committee and the Superintendent. MSBE found no evidence the local board had reviewed or read the novel. The Harford County Board of Education is asking the Circuit Court to overturn the State Board of Education's decision. The ACLU of Maryland and the Maryland State Education Association will argue why the State BOE's decision is the only just decision under the Constitution and Freedom to Read Act.

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