

Submitter: Emily O'Neal
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB1583

The United States Constitution says that all Americans, regardless of age have a right to Freedom of Speech. Courts have held that in order to be able to have informed speech, one must first have informed thought, which courts have further said, comes from a freedom to learn, and yes, read. Therefore, all Americans have a right to think whatever they want, to learn, whatever they want, and yes, read, whatever they want. If you reverse engineer the term “intellectual freedom” it means, freedom of your own intellect, and it is a First Amendment right.

As we look at that right, we also know that our rights are given to us at birth, they are for Americans of all ages. This means that the right to information is a right to all library users, regardless of their age, including school aged children. Children have a right to learn and grow and it is our responsibility to not infringe on those rights by censoring the ideals they have access to, especially when those ideals are rooted in voices that have been traditionally silenced, which is the case with our protected classes.

By definition: Censorship is the suppression of ideas and information that some individuals, groups, or government officials find objectionable or dangerous. Would-be censors try to use the power of the state to impose their view of what is truthful and appropriate, or offensive and objectionable, on everyone else. Censors pressure public institutions, like libraries, to suppress and remove information they judge inappropriate or dangerous from public access, so that no one else has the chance to read or view the material and make up their own minds about it. The censor wants to prejudge materials for everyone.

Opponents of SB1593 would have you believe that a library collection purged of diverse literature that may include mature language, themes, and scenes is a benefit to student development. But a study in the journal Reading Research Quarterly (2014) found that students who read diverse literature were more likely to demonstrate increased empathy and perspective-taking abilities compared to a control group. In addition, the American Library Association’s report, “Why Diversity Matters,” highlights the positive impact of varied literature on youth’s cognitive and affective development and how it fosters empathy, understanding and critical thinking. SB1593 helps protect students’ right to choose diverse literature, which increases their opportunity to cultivate the invaluable character traits and soft skills that are essential for leadership roles and success in one’s career and personal life.

Furthermore, I’d like to point out the Oregon Department of Education provides the

following Guidance to School Districts: Addressing Challenged Materials in K-12 Education. It would benefit you greatly to read or reread this guidance. Additionally, In a 1982 U.S. Supreme Court case, Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District v. Pico, the Court held that school officials cannot remove books from May 2019 2 a school library simply because they find the ideas in the book objectionable.

In closing, I want to remind this Legislature that you have an expectation to your community. That expectation comes from the First Amendment Rights of your constituents, which includes their right to read and learn freely. It is not your role to say to your members of your community what they can and cannot think, what they can and cannot learn, and what they can and cannot read, regardless of age. Only a parent can do that, for their own minor children. To allow for these censorship and discrimination tactics to continue (especially for protected classes), you open school system up to legal concerns, as well as further aggression tactics. It also says to those you serve that you believe you know better than they do as to what they can learn, think and read.