



# Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor



**State Library  
of Oregon**

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February 9, 2024

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber, and Members of the Committee:

The State Library of Oregon supports libraries of all kinds throughout the state, including school libraries. As part of those efforts, staff provide consulting and information to libraries facing materials challenges. We maintain the [Oregon Intellectual Freedom Clearinghouse \(OIFC\)](#), which compiles information concerning intellectual freedom challenges in libraries and schools in Oregon. We submit this testimony to share information we have learned through our work that may be helpful as you consider SB 1583. The State Library has no position on SB 1583.

OIFC collects reports of objections to library materials, policies, displays, and programs, as well as reports of hate crimes, confidentiality issues, and related incidents. Those incidents are compiled in [annual reports](#). As we noted in this [press release](#) last September, public libraries and schools reported challenges to more books and other materials between July 2022 and June 2023 than at any point since we began collecting data in 1987. Slightly over half of the challenged materials were at school libraries. This data is all available in the [OIFC 2023 report](#).

The initiator of a challenge may state a variety of reasons for challenging a material's inclusion in a library or school. Common objections include claims that a material is sexually explicit, contains profanity, is unsuited to its target age group, or expresses an objectionable viewpoint. In 2022-23, 10% of the titles were challenged explicitly because they included LGBTQ+ content.

No matter the stated reason for a challenge, one pattern is clear: challenged materials are disproportionately about, by, or center the story of people from an underrepresented race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, or disability – the same groups protected from discrimination by ORS 659.850. Over 70% of the items challenged in 2022-23 focus on one or more of those identities.

There is also evidence of the mental and emotional toll these challenges have on library and school staff. Challenges increase the workload of schools and libraries, as they often result in monthslong review processes like [what occurred at Canby School District](#) when multiple titles were challenged. In both the challenge reports we receive and our staff's experience consulting with libraries, we also commonly see school and library staff speciously labeled as "pedophiles" or "groomers" or their commitment to serving children questioned. In at least two instances last year, staff's lives were threatened.

*The State Library of Oregon cultivates, preserves, and delivers library and information services to foster lifelong learning and community engagement.*

The data we have shared here was gathered through reports of challenges at schools and libraries, media stories, and our staff's experience working on challenge incidents. However, we have reason to believe that incidents in Oregon are underreported. Many school and library staff are not aware of the option to report such incidents. Despite the anonymity of the reporting process, staff also may be loath to report for fear of political blowback, job repercussions, or media attention on their organization.

We anticipate the numbers we have shared here would be significantly higher if all intellectual freedom incidents in Oregon were reported. Incidents may be particularly underreported in schools. We have seen higher incidences of challenges in schools that are handled "quietly" by removing materials from the library with no review process. Also, due to the [extremely low number](#) of certified teacher-librarians employed in Oregon's public schools, school libraries in the state are often staffed by dedicated classified staff who frequently lack formal training or education in library principles and practices. These staff may be unaware of best practices around materials challenges.

We hope that this information is useful to your discussion about SB 1583. More information is available in the OIFC 2023 report and earlier reports linked above. We are also happy to answer any questions the committee may have about materials challenges in Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wendy Cornelisen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small flourish at the end.

Wendy Cornelisen  
State Librarian